

The Monster of Milwaukee: Sexuality, Disorder, and the Myth of Jeffrey Dahmer

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Abstract

Jeffrey Dahmer, a resident of Milwaukee, committed a series of horrific crimes in which he killed seventeen men, primarily targeting black gay men. He not only took their lives but also preserved their bodies and, disturbingly, consumed some of their remains. These actions left many baffled and prompted psychologists and true-crime enthusiasts to seek an understanding of the motivations behind these heinous acts. Interestingly, when examining true-crime documentaries about Jeffrey Dahmer, one can observe a significant omission regarding the homophobic and racial aspects of his crimes. Most psychologists diagnosed Dahmer with psychopathic personality disorder, a condition often associated with serial killers who commit crimes without clear motives. Notably, one of the diagnostic criteria for psychopathy includes sexual perversion, leading to scrutiny of Dahmer's sexuality as a potential explanation for his gruesome actions. This scrutiny resulted in the formation of a connection between Dahmer's sexuality and his violent crimes. During the 1980s, when AIDS emerged and was initially dubbed the 'gay plague', mainstream culture associated homosexuality with violence and death. Dahmer's arrest only fuelled the homophobic narrative, further stigmatising non-normative sexuality. This paper takes a closer look at Jeffrey Dahmer, not as an isolated individual but as a product of the society in which he existed. It examines the myths surrounding Dahmer, specifically those related to his mental disorder and his sexuality. Drawing on the analysis of David Schmid, this paper argues that true-crime narratives reinforce the idea that heterosexuality represents normality while branding homosexuality as monstrous, primarily by establishing an exaggerated link between homosexuality and violence. This analysis looks at the construction of psychopathy in relation to sexuality to understand how Dahmer's depiction as a psychopath is primarily connected to his sexuality and how the myth of Dahmer continues to demonise non-normative sexuality in the popular psyche.

Keywords: *Heteropatriarchy, Myth, Serial Killer, Psychopathy, Homosexuality, Violence.*

On 22 July 1991, the arrest of Jeffrey Dahmer, a six-foot-tall white gay man, shocked the American public. It was revealed that this seemingly

ordinary individual had committed heinous acts, killing and consuming the flesh of seventeen men, most of whom were black and gay, in his modest Milwaukee apartment. The gruesome details of his crimes quickly dominated headlines, thrusting Dahmer into the national spotlight. Even three decades after his arrest, his notoriety remains undiminished. In 2022, Netflix released *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*, a docuseries, to further contribute to his mythical status. This paper is dedicated to examining the myth that surrounds Dahmer and the mythical persona he embodies. As Leslie Fiedler said, 'It is the myth...which finally concerns us, not the man who has survived it; for the myth has a life of its own.'¹

Notably, the initial categorization of Dahmer as 'LGBTQ' in the Netflix true-crime docuseries, along with tags like dark, crime, and horror, stirred significant controversy on social media. In response to this backlash, Netflix removed the LGBTQ label. It is noteworthy that such labels as 'heterosexual' or 'straight' are never used in documentaries about heterosexual serial killers or psychopaths. Hence, this research seeks to explore how true-crime documentaries often emphasise the sexuality of queer killers in their narratives while largely ignoring the sexuality of straight killers. Dahmer's characterisation as a homicidal homosexual or gay psychopath gained prominence due to the prevailing stigmatisation of psychopathy and homosexuality in 20th-century America. Dahmer's monstrosity further amplified the homophobic narrative prevalent at the time. Following Michel Foucault, Cary Federman has argued that monsters and deviants (social or sexual) mark the contours of societal and cultural norms.² Psychopaths in twentieth-century America came to manifest monstrosities that marked the limits of culture. Richard Tithecott, in *Of Men and Monsters*³, argues that the FBI or the American police force appropriated the psychological terminology to justify their surveillance and policing actions. To bolster their authority and influence, the repressive state apparatus, along with the ideological state apparatus, mythicised the figure of the psychopathic serial killer. Concrete depictions of these monsters helped solidify these myths in the public mind. Figures like Dahmer, along with Leopold and Loeb, John Wayne Gacy, and even fictional characters like Hannibal Lecter and Tom Ripley, all provided the images of the monsters that policing discourses needed. According to Hervey Cleckley, what renders psychopaths particularly dangerous is their

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skill in concealing their true nature behind what he calls the ‘mask of sanity.’⁴ This means that psychopaths can appear perfectly normal and unremarkable, much like an average person living next door. This ability to blend in and hide their true tendencies deeply unsettled the general public. Consequently, there arose a heightened sense of urgency for the construction of specialised law enforcement units dedicated to apprehending individuals with the potential for such criminal behaviour. However, the concept of psychopathy is full of ambiguity and lacks a clear-cut definition. As Federman argues,

The construction of the psychopath, as a historically ill-defined concept, as the main figure of modern monstrosity, involves the elaboration of a technical knowledge system that is capable of characterising anyone who deviates from the norm as dangerous to persons and to society.⁵

It is pertinent to mention that in Europe, where the concept of psychopathy originated, homosexuality was not associated with the disorder. However, with the introduction of psychoanalysis in North America in the first-half of the twentieth century, psychiatrists concentrated on an individual’s sexual development to explain their deviant behaviour. Leading psychiatrist Eugen Kahn, who had worked extensively on psychopathic personalities, suggested that psychopathy, like homosexuality, was the result of a certain arrest of sexual development.⁶ This association of psychopathy with both social and sexual deviancy gained popularity in North America during the twentieth century. In light of these observations, this paper seeks to undertake a genealogical investigation into the evolution of the concept of psychopathy, scrutinising the discursive forces that have played a pivotal role in its formulation. Subsequently, this study delves into an analysis of how the enduring myth surrounding Jeffrey Dahmer functions as a tool of heteropatriarchy.

Brief History of Psychopathic Disorder and Homosexuality:

Since its inception more than 200 years ago, the construction of psychopathy has undergone several changes. In 1801, the French psychiatrist Phillipe Pinel reported that a number of his patients engaged in impulsive behaviour, violent outbursts, and self-harm. He observed that these individuals were aware of the irrationality of their behaviour. He diagnosed these individuals with *manie sans délire* (insanity without

delirium).⁷ American psychiatrist Benjamin Rush observed a number of patients in the early 1800s who had morally repugnant behaviour and an absence of clarity in thought. Rush went beyond Pinel's more affectively-based explanation and argued that moral deprivation was a congenital flaw or a disease. Benjamin Rush is recognised for having been among the pioneers of what is now an enduring strategy to denounce those who are classified as psychopaths. J.C. Prichard, a British physician, coined the phrase 'moral insanity' in 1835. Moral insanity, as defined by Prichard, is 'a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties.'⁸ Critics claim that Prichard's definition of 'moral insanity' was too inclusive and included various mental disorders. By the late 1800s, the majority of psychiatrists had abandoned the concept of 'moral insanity' as a useful scientific concept, substituting the term 'psychopathic inferiority.' This new nomenclature, which defined emotional and moral abnormality based on congenital factors, was widely accepted in Europe and the United States.

In 1904, Krafft-Ebing was less compassionate toward individuals considered morally depraved. He associated chronic social deviance with pathology during that time.⁹ Krafft-Ebing has also constructed some significant psychological concepts that have crucial implications for the most violent psychopaths. He included the terms 'sadism' and 'masochism' in the assessment lexicon. Krafft-Ebing noted that sadism in psychopaths was especially worrying because those with this mental disorder were much more prone to act on their violent urges. A prominent European psychiatrist, Karpman (1931), notes, 'Psychopaths exhibit a combination of hypersexuality with a strong homosexual component.'¹⁰ Freedman observes that before the 1920s, American psychiatrists commonly used the term 'psychopath' to describe either unemployed men or hypersexual women.

After the 1920s, criminologists increasingly used psychiatric diagnosis to shed light on criminally prosecuted inmates. For example, in 1921, the Massachusetts legislature adopted Briggs Law, which compelled the mental evaluation of recidivist convicts and those convicted of capital offences. Many of these inmates who could not be categorised as

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insane or mentally ill were subsequently labelled psychopathic. Beginning in the 1930s, criminologists, politicians, and medical experts employed the concept of the male psychopath to address male deviance, which became more prevalent amidst the socioeconomic turmoil of the Great Depression, characterised by disrupted family structures and widespread male unemployment. According to Ari Worthman (2002), ‘as the image of the man who was not economically self-sufficient and family-oriented increasingly came to defy normality, the psychopath diagnosis was used to explain his nonconformist behaviour.’¹¹ Joseph Pleck, a psychologist, contends that during the 1930s when social and economic support for the conventional male role appeared to be disappearing, psychiatrists focused on sex differences and sexual defiance to establish the psychological basis of masculinity. As a result, the profile of the male psychopath grew more intertwined with that of the sexual deviant, who was also viewed as a violator of social order and moral standards and who violated gender norms by living outside of family supervision. This increased interest in the sexually deviant necessitated an in-depth study of human sexuality, encompassing notions of normality and the delineation of deviant behaviour. This study of human sexuality, according to Freedman, ‘helped legitimise nonviolent, but nonprocreative, sexual acts within marriage or outside it.’¹²

Another factor contributing to the association of homosexuality with psychopathic personality is the adoption of psychoanalysis in America. In the 1920s, Freudian conceptions of psychoanalysis began to flow across the realms of psychiatry and criminology, a process that was accelerated by the immigration of European analysts to America. In the early 1930s, a few discussions of psychopaths, including the 1931 translation of Kahn’s *Psychopathic Personality*, referred to infant sexuality and arrested sexual development. In 1937, an article in *The Psychoanalytic Review* described the psychopath as ‘the phallic man, fixated on an infantile stage of boundless bisexual energy.’¹³ By the late 1930s, most studies of psychopaths included at least one section on sexual kinds, such as overt homosexuals, exhibitionists, sadists, masochists, and voyeurs. Freedman states, ‘some authors explicitly linked such deviants to the commission of sexual crimes.’¹⁴ Benjamin Karpman, the chief psychotherapist at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, D.C., was one of the most prominent

advocates of the psychosexual interpretation of psychopathic behaviour. Karpman believed the average sexual psychopath was all instinct and impulse. According to Karpman, the psychopath is 'always on the go for sexual satisfaction... like a cancer patient who is always hungry no matter how much he is fed.'¹⁵ This portrayal of the sexual psychopath found its way into the law through the popular press.

In the third decade of the twentieth century, a sex crime panic erupted in North America, lasting until the 1970s. This was primarily fuelled by extensive and sensationalised press coverage of numerous crimes perpetrated against children. From 1937 onwards, allegations of sex crimes increased dramatically, and family magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Parents' Magazine* published pieces headlined *Queer People and Sex Psychopath*. However, other psychologists and academics, including Dr. Alfred Kinsey, concluded that there existed no proof of a rise or decline in sex crimes during the past fifty years. Despite the absence of evidence that rape, child murder, or minor sex offences had grown, the public's awareness of sexual violence resulted in calls for the state to impose sanctions on sex crimes. In 1937, following the killings of two children in New York City, residents of Ridgewood urged that the police be given more authority to 'take suspicious characters in hand before they commit the crimes.'¹⁶ Due to the sex crime panic, police roundups of perverts, heightened surveillance, and bar raids became regular. Law enforcement officers mostly targeted 'minor offenders, such as male homosexuals.'¹⁷ During the sex crime panic, state leaders and law enforcement established sexual psychopath laws to eliminate sex crimes. Between 1935 and 1939, five American states passed sexual psychopath laws. During World War II, psychiatric experts in Washington opted to utilise 'sexual psychopath' as the official diagnosis for homosexuals in the military, even though the actual description of this condition was heavily contested among wartime psychiatrists. The broad acceptance of the construction of homosexuals as 'psychopaths' was one of the many legacies of World War II. By 1948, psychiatric nomenclature was in a complete state of disorder due to the widespread post-war trend to label any unexplainable human behaviour, including homosexuality, as psychopathy.

New rhetoric on homosexuality and criminality emerged due to

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psychiatrists' frequent failure to differentiate between psychopaths with criminal tendencies and psychopaths who were merely homosexuals. In response to the growing threat of homosexual psychopaths, politicians and legislators in twenty-one American states, including Washington, D.C., enacted laws regarding sexual psychopaths by the mid-twentieth century. These laws, however, neither specified the criminal acts nor distinguished between violent and nonviolent or consensual and non-consensual behaviour. These rules targeted a type of personality – those who displayed tendencies to engage in same-sex sexual activity – that trained psychiatrists could only detect and diagnose. These laws dictated that convicted sexual psychopaths be placed in state hospitals and psychiatric wards indefinitely or until psychiatrists deemed them cured. The indefinite confinement of homosexuals would safeguard society from the threat of violent sex crimes. The large body of literature surrounding the sexual psychopath has concentrated primarily on defining aberrant sexual activities. Consequently, nonprocreative heterosexual acts have become normal in modern America, while homosexual acts have become psychopathic sexual acts. Freedman notes that throughout the nationwide campaign against sexual psychopaths, terms like pervert, homosexual, psychopath, sex criminal, sex offender, sex degenerate, and even child molester were interchangeable in the minds of the general public, politicians, police, and legal officials.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, during the peak of the sex-crime panic, U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy linked communism with homosexuality. McCarthy sparked a red scare in 1950 when he claimed that communist agents had entered the State Department and other government departments. He viewed both communists and homosexuals as national security threats. *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (1990), by historian Allan Bérubé, is essential to understanding this persecution of homosexuals under McCarthy. People who did not match the straight categorisation were red-listed, fired, and publicly outed during the McCarthy era. Around the same time, Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society to fight against oppression. The reputation of Hay as a communist and homosexual was used against homosexual activists to fuel the homophobic and capitalist American imagination. In the 1950s, the functioning sexual psychopath laws, which linked

communism with homosexuality, resulted in the widespread persecution of homosexuals.

However, many objections were raised against the sexual psychopath laws. Several courts deemed the laws to be legally problematic. Some criticised the way the laws were enforced, both in terms of who committed the crimes and how sexual psychopaths were prosecuted. In *The Sexual Offender and His Offenses* (1954), Benjamin Karpman wrote, 'the term 'sexual psychopath' and 'sexual psychopathy' have no legitimate place in psychiatric nosology or dynamic classification.'¹⁸ Judge Morris Ploscowe concurred with Karpman and opined that the primary function of sexual psychopath laws is to distinguish between 'dangerous offenders' and 'minor offenders' who should be tried under the regular criminal laws: 'The sex-psychopath laws fail miserably in this vital task.'¹⁹ In addition, homosexuality was removed from the DSM III in 1973, invalidating the legal link between psychopathy and homosexuality. Finally, American states started repealing sexual psychopath laws in the 1970s in response to all the criticism against the laws.

Even after the dissociation of homosexuality and psychopathy from medico-legal reasoning, the homophobic imagination perpetuated the image of the queer psychopath. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed an upsurge in films depicting queer psychopaths, and the emergence of AIDS, termed the 'gay plague', contributed to the homophobic association of homosexuality with death (Tithcott). These images of violent homosexuals, queer psychopaths, and homicidal homosexuals are primarily based on news reports and true-crime narratives of homosexual serial killers. Schmidt contends that reports of violent heterosexual psychopaths (such as serial killers) are more prevalent than reports of violent homosexual psychopaths, yet true-crime narratives seldom attribute their crimes to their heterosexuality. To protect heterosexuality from violence, true-crime narratives associate 'monstrosity' with 'homosexuality' and 'normality' with 'heterosexuality'. For the purpose of demonising and stigmatising queer sexuality, the concept of the homosexual psychopath is repeatedly projected to establish a concrete image in the collective psyche. Tom Ripley, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ed Gein, Aileen Wuornos, Hannibal Lecter, Leopold, and Loeb are a few examples of such 'homosexual psychopaths' who never faded from the mainstream

sphere due to constant remakes. These figures are constructed and reconstructed, interpreted and reinterpreted to fit a particular narrative set by homophobic society to validate and justify the surveillance that individuals are subjected to.

Queering Jeffrey Dahmer and His Violence:

David Schmid, in *Natural Born Celebrities*, argues that the term monster is an ambiguous term with no distinct meaning, however true-crime narratives employ terms like ‘monstrosity’ and ‘normality’ as undifferentiated categories. Schmid says,

When we consider the fact, for example, that the vast majority of serial killers are straight men and the vast majority of their victims are women, it becomes clear that it is not just a gender- or sexuality-neutral “us” that is threatened by an association with the apparently normal serial killer, but more specifically heterosexual men.²⁰

Consequently, functioning as a tool of the heterosexual cultural matrix, true-crime narratives found it incumbent to assert the ‘innocence’ of straight, violent individuals by disavowing the implicit link between their heterosexuality and violence. One way of delinking heterosexuality from the violence of straight serial killers is ‘to map the terms “normality” and “monstrosity” onto “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality,” thus demonising homosexuality by arguing that it is intimately connected (indeed, almost identical) with violence.’²¹ In short, true-crime narratives thus illustrate the lack of connection between violence and heterosexuality by emphasising just how closely homosexuality and violence are connected. In Dahmer’s case, it is his sexuality that has been condemned as contributing in many ways to his criminal activities.

Tamara Higgs, in *Jeffrey Dahmer: Psychopathy and Neglect*, already discussed the psychopathic tendencies exhibited by Dahmer. Irrespective of the period, the psychopath almost always symbolises a ‘cold and ruthless killer, acting without remorse and overt signs of mental illness, and preying on vulnerable individuals.’²² Dahmer’s superficial charm, which he has used to lure his victims, his lack of sympathy and guilt, his manipulative nature, his absence of meaningful human bonds, and his proclivity for violating cultural and societal norms make him an exemplary psychopath. However, it needs to be pointed out that Robert Hare did not specify the social norms that psychopaths find so hard to adjust to.

Federman et al. argue that ‘the psychopath is both the sum total of twenty different psychological states and of any one of its parts. The psychopath both is and is not, hence his danger and our foreboding.’²³ The lack of clear descriptions of psychopathic symptoms renders the discourse ambiguous and leaves open the possibility of classifying anyone who deviates from the norm as psychopathic. Higgs focuses on Dahmer’s childhood to find an explanation for his early signs of psychopathic tendencies. Higgs says, ‘Although interviews with Dahmer’s family tell of a happy young boy who loved animals and nature, his family also speaks of an unexplainable darkness that crept into their little boy.’²⁴ Lionel Dahmer, Jeffrey’s father, in his book *A Father’s Story*, notes one instance where the four-year-old Dahmer was diagnosed with a hernia. Lionel Dahmer mentions that it is because of the fear of castration (losing Dahmer’s penis due to surgery) that contributed to Dahmer’s later acts of genital mutilation on his victims.²⁵ Lionel Dahmer’s trust in the Freudian view of psychoanalysis helped him deal with his guilt as a father more than it explained Dahmer’s development of psychopathic or violent tendencies.

Dahmer’s personality puzzled both his father and researchers. Instead of examining the societal factors that could have played a role in causing Dahmer’s violent tendencies, the primary emphasis is on his early life and how he lived, as if psychopaths are naturally predisposed to their behaviour instead of being shaped by their environment. This tendency to scrutinise the personal habits of psychopathic individuals tends to absolve a heteropatriarchal society of its responsibility in shaping the upbringing of such individuals, attributing it mainly to the family rather than broader societal influences. Schmid argues that the straight gaze of heteropatriarchal society attempts to establish a correlation between homosexuality and violence. And in that attempt to establish a link, true-crime media reports proliferated with descriptions of Dahmer’s bedroom:

In the bathroom, where, Dahmer confessed, he had dismembered many of his victims, a picture of a nude male was taped next to the mirror. In the bedroom, on top of a dresser, were a television, a beer can, and a pornographic male homosexual videotape. The top dresser drawer contained about thirty Polaroid photos taken by Dahmer at various stages of his victims’ deaths.²⁶

The connection between violence and homosexuality is also evident in

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narratives about other male homosexual serial killers, such as the case of Elmer Wayne Henley's murders. In 1973, Jack Olsen recounted a conversation between Dorothy Hilligeist and Lieutenant Breck Porter. During this conversation, Porter conveyed the tragic news that Hilligeist's son had been discovered deceased, along with other victims. When the mother enquires further about the crime, the Lieutenant says, "'it looks like a homosexual thing'... We haven't figured out ourself yet, but it looks like these clowns were molesting young boys and then killing them."²⁷ In history, there have been no such instances where the murder of young girls is characterised by the investigating officer as a heterosexual thing. The overemphasis on the homosexual aspects of a crime serves as a link connecting homosexuality with violence. True crime narratives play a significant role in perpetuating these myths in the public's imagination.

The idea that extreme violence is inherently linked to homosexuality is reinforced by the phrase 'homosexual overkill' to describe Dahmer's murders. This phrase was introduced by Jeffrey M. Jentzen, a medical examiner in Milwaukee County, in 1990 to explain that Dahmer used excessive force in his killings. However, the use of this phrase reflects a homophobic societal bias against homosexuality more than it accurately describes the crimes. It raises a pertinent question, as posed by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force a week after Dahmer's arrest: 'When, for example, has the term 'heterosexual overkill' been used to describe the serial killing of women by a male perpetrator?'"²⁸ A less biased examination of Dahmer's crimes might reveal that they were influenced by homophobia. Dahmer's father, influenced by patriarchal beliefs, held strong homophobic views. Dahmer's efforts to conceal his own homosexual desires may have led to his killings of homosexual men he encountered in bars. His attempt could then be considered an effort to kill the homosexual within. It might be crucial to note that gay self-hatred has already been acknowledged but never been analysed in detail in gay crimes. Gay self-hatred is a result of homophobia prevalent in the large socio-cultural milieu to which an individual belongs.

The Myth of Dahmer's Origin:

Richard Tithecott in *Of Men and Monsters* argues,

As Freud-who, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, contemplates the problem of diagnosing whole civilizations as neurotic without the aid of a

comparative context... might remark, we should be wary of diagnosing psychopaths within what can appear to be a context made up in part by psychopathy.²⁹

In the first half of the twentieth century, psychiatrists used murderers, rapists, and thugs as test subjects to investigate psychopathy as they were textbook instances of the disorder. And since the test subjects were criminals, the study results always revealed more about psychopathic criminals than about psychopathy per se. The attempt was then made to detect and identify persons with personality disorders even before they committed a crime, resulting in civilians being subjected to increased surveillance and a close examination of individuals' childhood behaviours. Consequently, the quest for the origin story and the motive of motiveless murderers became crucial. This quest required a well-structured account of the widely circulated childhood myth of the psychopath, a myth that facilitates the surveillance of the private spheres of civilians' lives.

True-crime narratives have often depicted Dahmer's family as dysfunctional, with a particular focus on his mother, who struggled with drug addiction. This tradition of attributing the origin of a monster to the mother was prevalent in the nineteenth century. Richard Tithecott points out that in her 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley felt compelled to include an introduction describing the origin of the story. Tithecott suggests, 'Shelley... might tell us not to locate the truth of a monster in his mother, not to figure mothers as the origins of their sons' stories, and thus not to add to the anxiety of the mothers of our monsters.'³⁰ Lionel Dahmer, Jeffrey's father, carries a sense of guilt for his absence in Jeffrey's life. In Dahmer's case, the paternal influence remained largely unrealized. The absence of a strong patriarchal figure can result in perceived failure, specifically in failing to instil heteropatriarchal norms in the child. Dahmer's childhood supports Tithecott's assertion that 'the dysfunctional family unit is largely figured as a place lacking the father. With patriarchy absent, matriarchy rules, and the results are perceived as monstrous.'³¹ From the perspective that men are seen as the creators of structure, a sense of place, and meaning, the psychopath, who embodies a profound sense of meaninglessness, may be perceived as a product of femaleness or maternal influence.

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Linking the origin of a psychopathic individual to their family serves to absolve society of shared responsibility. Hannah Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, illustrates how, in Nazi Germany, 'evil' operated as a systematic and banal mechanism. However, attributing the origin of an evil psychopath to a dysfunctional household removes the opportunity to question the societal system that allows for the emergence of such evil individuals. 'Family' thus functions both as a microcosmic representation of heteropatriarchal society and as a unit that separates an individual from the society. In 1991, following Jeffrey Dahmer's apprehension on one of the television shows, one of Dahmer's classmates suggested that Dahmer's actions might have been influenced by cultural homophobia and racism. A member of the audience responds, 'I think that's up to his family to take care of that, and the people that are around him when he's growing up. That's not whole society in general.'³² The family is responsible for 'disciplining' and 'policing' the activities of the child. And if the family fails to 'raise' the child as per the societal norm, the family will also share a proportion of the blame. However, society in no way can be held accountable for the crimes of a psychopath. The family becomes an extension of the state that constantly monitors an individual's way of life. The family functions as an agent of the state, which follows and transmits the knowledge (created by the state) to the next generation. The family isolates the individual from society if the individual turns out to be abnormal, so society can claim to have no connection with it. Through a 'sexually aberrant' psychopath such as Dahmer, the state has propagated a narrative that equates homosexuality with homicidal tendencies. The discourse of psychopathy has established a narrative through which the personality and sexuality of an individual can be policed and disciplined. Since the focus shifted from criminal psychopaths to 'potential psychopaths', 'surveillance' has become more rigorous. Every moment of a person's life (how they grow up, what they eat, how they speak) is scrutinised, and the discourse of psychopathy justifies this scrutiny.

Dahmer's myth serves to justify the pervasive influence of state apparatuses. It instils a childlike reverence for these systems of surveillance and control. Dahmer is the face of modern monstrosity who comes to represent the Lacanian 'sinthome',³³ the fissure, the crack that exposes the flaws within the culture. Dahmer's myth has been projected

and proliferated to serve as a tool of the heteropatriarchal system. However, Dahmer's sexuality remains the extra, which refuses to be grasped by the Symbolic structure (i.e. language). The ideological state apparatus appropriates the sinthome by using the figure of the monster to uphold the repressive structure of society, which the monster seeks to escape from. Nevertheless, the sinthome refuses to vanish, and no amount of appropriation can erase the void it creates. It lingers within culture, haunting it. Dahmer's sexuality, like the sinthome, continues to haunt culture. The state apparatus does not seek Dahmer's obscurity; on the contrary, his conspicuous presence validates their actions. Dahmer, as the ne plus ultra of modern monstrosity, refuses to be fully appropriated by heteropatriarchy. His myth is, in fact, a tool of ideological state apparatus, a construct of heteropatriarchy, which, if analysed through a queer lens, has the capacity to expose the cultural wounds that lie beneath the surface.

Endnotes :

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- ⁵ Federman, Holmes and Jacob, 'Deconstructing the Psychopath', 38.
- ⁶ Eugen Kahn, *Psychopathic Personalities* (Yale University, 1931), p. 13.
- ⁷ Quoted in Federman, Holmes and Jacob, 'Deconstructing the Psychopath', 47.
- ⁸ Quoted in Bruce Arrigo and Stacey Shipley, 'The Confusion Over Psychopathy (I): Historical Considerations', in *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 45 (2001): 325–44.
- ⁹ Quoted in Arrigo and Shipley, 'The Confusion Over Psychopathy (I)', 332.
- ¹⁰ Benjamin Karpman, *The Sexual Offender and His Offenses* (New York: Julian Press, 1954), p. 91.

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- ¹² Estelle Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960’, *The Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 83-106.
- ¹³ Quoted in Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires”, 91.
- ¹⁴ Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires”, 91.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in Ari Worthman, *Murder Trial of a Sex Psychopath*, p. 43.
- ¹⁶ Tamara Rice Lave, ‘Only Yesterday: The Rise and Fall of Twentieth Century Sexual Psychopath Laws’, *La. L. Rev.* 69 (2009): 549-591.
- ¹⁷ Freedman, “Uncontrolled Desires”, 95.
- ¹⁸ Benjamin Karpman, *The Sexual Offender and His Offenses*, p. 478.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Lave, ‘Only Yesterday’, 563.
- ²⁰ David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (Chicago University Press, 2005), p. 209.
- ²¹ David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 209.
- ²² Federman, Holmes and Jacob, ‘Deconstructing the Psychopath’, 48.
- ²³ Federman, Holmes and Jacob, ‘Deconstructing the Psychopath’, 41.
- ²⁴ Tamara Higgs, *Jeffrey Dahmer: Psychopathy and Neglect* (Colorado: Regis University Student Publications, 2012), p. 9.
- ²⁵ Lionel Dahmer, *A Father’s Story* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1994), p. 34.
- ²⁶ David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 224.
- ²⁷ Quoted in David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 224.
- ²⁸ Quoted in David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 226.
- ²⁹ Richard Tithecott and James R. Kincaid, *Of Men and Monsters*, p. 38.
- ³⁰ Richard Tithecott and James R. Kincaid, *Of Men and Monsters*, p. 45.
- ³¹ Richard Tithecott and James R. Kincaid, *Of Men and Monsters*, p. 45.
- ³² Quoted in Richard Tithecott and James R. Kincaid, *Of Men and Monsters*, p. 41.
- ³³ Jacques Lacan, in his seminar XXIII, *Le Sinthome* (1975-76), introduces the concept of ‘sinthome’, which exists at the intersection of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. Lacan writes that the sinthome does not cease to write itself. The sinthome is what escapes categorisation, the extra which resists appropriation.