

Deadly Performance of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Study of Jeffrey Dahmer

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the portrayal of masculinity in *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022), emphasizing on how Jeffrey Dahmer performs hegemonic masculine traits despite his marginalized sexual identity. Using a qualitative textual analysis method, this research applies R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyze key scenes depicting Dahmer's criminal acts. This study found that Dahmer consistently embodies hegemonic masculine traits, such as domination, control, and power, as well as the objectification of the others. His murdering acts are not isolated events, but rather ritualized performances that reaffirm masculine dominance through repeated acts of violence. Despite his queerness puts him outside the heteronormative masculinity, it does not subvert the patriarchal structure, in fact, it coexists with it through his acts. This study highlights the adaptability of hegemonic masculinity across different heteronormative sexual identities and challenges the assumption that queerness inherently resists dominant gender norms. The implications extend to the fields of gender studies, media studies, true crime narratives, and criminology studies, urging scholars and audiences to reconsider the intersection of queerness, race, and masculinity in representation of crime narrative. Future research is encouraged to explore further on the audiences' reception toward perpetrators across diverse identity and cultural context.

Keywords: *hegemonic masculinity; gender performativity; queer; Jeffrey Dahmer.*

INTRODUCTION

Netflix series *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022), created and directed by Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan as the co-creator, reignited public discourse around true crime media and the cultural obsession with serial killers (Feinberg, 2022). The series shows the life and crimes of Jeffrey Dahmer, one of the most heinous serial killers in American history, who has murdered seventeen men and boys between 1978 until 1991 (Strause, 2022). This series has been widely criticized for potentially glamorizing Dahmer. Evan Peters is casted to portray Dahmer (Feinberg, 2022), which possess the deliverance of Dahmer's emotional depth and physical attractiveness.

This paper argues that the portrayal of Jeffrey Dahmer in the Netflix series illustrates the relation of traditional masculinity with violence and control, while also demonstrating how queer identity does not challenge patriarchal structures. In examining this topic, this study employs a cultural and textual analysis of the series

focusing on the cinematographic choices and character portrayed in the series. Theory of hegemonic masculinity by Raewyn W. Connell is applied to examine the concept of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, and how it is represented through Dahmer's arcs and character.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) critically assess the concept of hegemonic masculinity. They defend the concept against criticism of essentialism, while acknowledging valid critiques of trait models and typologies. Hegemonic masculinity challenges traditional views of gender roles by presenting masculinity as a set of practices that maintain men's dominance over women, rather than a fixed, biological traits. Quoting from R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005): *"Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities...it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men... Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion... More precisely, there could be a struggle for hegemony... It was perhaps possible that a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward and abolition of gender hierarchies"* (2005, pp: 832-833).

It can be said that masculinity is not a singular entity, but exists in multiple forms, with hegemonic masculinity being the most honored way of being a man (R. Connell, 2016). This concept of masculinity challenges the traditional views on social construction of gender. While traditional masculinity views gender roles as natural and fixed biologically, hegemonic masculinity constructed gender role based on the social settings and expectations (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yang, 2020). Revisiting Gramsci's hegemony theory, hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed set of traits, but a structural position in a social hierarchy, allowing for a more dynamic understanding of gender and power (Yang, 2020).

However, the analysis also applies Judith Butler's queer theory, particularly the concept of gender performativity. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity challenges traditional notions of gender identity by suggesting that gender is not an innate or essential quality, but rather a social construct that is created and maintained through repeated performances (He, 2017). Butler (1988) stated:

"The repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation...it is clear that although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is immediately public as well...indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame" (1998: p. 526).

This challenges the traditional view that gender is a fixed and stable identity that is determined by biological sex. Looking back from Simone de Beauvoir, Butler argues that gender is the cultural meaning assigned to the body based on sex and expands on this idea by suggesting that the concept of "sex" is socially constructed (Butler, 1999). Butler's concept of gender performativity suggests a new possibility for gender identity and expression (Butler, 1988; He, 2017). Butler's theory allows for an interrogation of how Dahmer's queer identity does not inherently dismantle his masculinity, but

instead performed along and within. Dahmer's queerness is not depicted as subversive, but it coexists with the hegemonic masculinity which leads to his violence acts.

The issue of his crime also intersects with issues of gender, race, and sexuality. As a white, queer man whose victims were from marginalized communities, Dahmer is depicted as both vulnerable and privilege in the society (King-Carroll, 2022). His queerness places him outside the normative expectations of masculinity, yet the extreme violence and need for control evident in his crime reflect deeply ingrained ideals of hegemonic masculinity. This paradox raises important questions: how does hegemonic masculinity performed and constructed in the figure of serial killer, in this case Jeffrey Dahmer, and in what way does the killing pattern serve as a performance of hegemonic masculinity despite Dahmer's sexual identity?

There are several studies that has examines masculinity and true crime series or films. Petra Fišerová (2019) in the article *From Toxic to Politically Correct: Masculinities in American Psycho and Darkly Dreaming Dexter* analyses two fictional killers, Patrick Bateman (*American Psycho*) and Dexter Morgan (*Darkly Dreaming Dexter*), embody two different types of masculinity. This article highlights the contrast between two types of masculinity in two fictional protagonist serial killers. The analysis focuses on the literal characters and their psychological profiles. Applying R.W. Connell's theory of masculinity, this research tries to understand how serial killers embody or resist dominant gender norms (Fišerová, 2019). This article discover that *American Psycho* presents the idea of an extreme toxic, hegemonic masculinity while *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* offers the counter version of hegemonic masculinity in serial killer narratives. Thus, this study suggest that *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* provides a nuance and sympathetic portrayal of a serial killer, challenging traditional masculine stereotype.

Another research entitled *Serial Killers, Media Involvement, and the Layers of Masculinity* by Kristina Steiner (2024) explores the gendered portrayals of serial killers in the character of Marie Belloc Lodger (*The Lodger*) and Meg Gardiner (*Unsub*) and both novels are inspired by real-life unsolved mystery cases, Jack the Ripper and Zodiac. The assumption of the killer in both novels are portrayed as male with stereotypical masculine traits. Steiner argues that these portrayals reflect the masculine trope that often seen in true crime narratives (Steiner, 2024). The analysis reveals that both novels feature male, white, violent serial killer protagonists with misogynistic ideologies. Both characters are actively seeking media attention for different reason, whereas it also suggests the interrelated with hegemonic masculinity but also modified within deviant masculinity. Therefore, this study found that there is a shift from deviant to hegemonic masculinity reflected in the fictionalized male serial killers in the popular culture products.

Salim and Jahangir's study, *The 'Masculine' Female Serial Killer: Monstrosity in Val McDermid's The Mermaid Singing* (2024), analyses how Val McDermid's *The Mermaid Singing* subverts traditional gender norms in crime fiction by presenting a female serial killer, Angelica, who embodies masculine traits, such as violence and monstrosity. The authors argue that the novel challenges patriarchal norms by disrupting the conventional stereotype of male perpetrator-female victim. The result finds that

McDermid's novel dismantles patriarchal norms which makes female violence visible critiques the social constructs of masculinity and femininity. Angelica, the female killer, fully embodies the masculine trait, such as domination, manipulation, and physical torture. The result contributes to the broader debate in gender studies about gender roles.

In "*Traits of Masculinity as Depicted in Avengers: Endgame*" (2021) by Pratama and Ningsih, the portrayal of masculinity in the movie *Avengers: Endgame* is analyzed using David & Brannon and Beynon framework on traits of masculinity. Focusing on the scenes and dialogues, the research explores the masculine traits illustrated by the male characters in the movie. The result shows that there are some expressions identified as seven types of masculinity, suggesting a shift toward more emotionally expressive and caregiving forms of masculinity in contemporary media, especially in the mainstream of superhero films.

Cuklanz and Erol (2021) in *The Shifting Image of Hegemonic Masculinity in Contemporary U.S. Television Series* examine how contemporary U.S. television series, such as *Prison Break*, *The Mandalorian*, and *The Witcher* depict evolving performances of hegemonic masculinity. Those shows, based on traditionally hypermasculine genres, integrate paternal care and emotional investment in family relationships, alongside traditional masculine traits—violence, stoicism, and physical strength. This study argues that there is a shifting in the concept of hegemonic masculinity, from the dominance and detachment to nurturing fatherhood, offering a more complex and humanized portrayal of male protagonist, especially in TV series and popular culture mainstream.

Recent studies have shown that masculinity in media is evolving beyond its stereotypes. Cuklanz & Erol (2021) examine a shift in U.S. Television series whereas traditional masculinity are balanced with emotional depth and fatherhood. Similarly, Pratama & Ningsih (2021) identify both traditional and hegemonic masculinity traits in *Avenger: Endgame*, highlighting broader range of gender performances. In crime genre, Fišerová (2019) explores the contrast differences between Patrick Bateman's toxic masculinity and Dexter Morgan's counterhegemonic masculinity, suggesting that psychotic male characters do not need to perpetuate traditional masculinity norms. Steiner (2024) also explores how fictional serial killers based on real-life figures exaggerate masculine traits, such as control and manipulation, and lastly, Salim & Jahangir (2024) further explore complicate gender norms of a female serial killer who adopt masculine-coded traits and violence that challenges traditional stereotypes. Existing research focus on fictional characters or idealized male heroes with little attention to real-life adaptation of a person in media.

Therefore, this study analyses the character of Jeffrey Dahmer in *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* to explore how hegemonic masculinity operates within a queer identity through the lens of gender performativity. It oversees how the masculine traits, such as power, emotional detachment, domination, and violence are portrayed through the visual storytelling and performance on screen. Applying

masculinity studies and queer theory, this research offers a new lens on masculinity in true crime media, filling the gap in existing scholarship.

METHOD

This research applies a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine the portrayal of masculinity of Jeffrey Dahmer in the Netflix limited series *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022). Textual analysis aims to uncover various interpretations rather than a single true meaning, focusing on cultural and ideological assumptions. Quoting from Arya (2020): “Based on interpretative approach, textual analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of a text...can include variations that focus on more specific methods within these disciplines, such as content analysis, semiotics, interactional analysis, and rhetoric criticism” (2020: p. 173). The series serves a cultural text through dominant and subversive gender narratives.

The analysis applies R. W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity and complements by Judith Butler’s queer theory to unveil the complexities of masculinity in a true crime context. Connell’s framework provides a lens to understand how emotional detachment, domination, and control align with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, while Butler’s theory enables an exploration of how Dahmer’s queerness intersects these performances of masculinity, especially in his murder. The primary data consist of selected still cuts from scenes that depict Jeffrey Dahmer’s emotional expressions and patterns of violence that interplay the masculinity and queerness of Dahmer. To ensure the analytical depth, the scenes are interpreted through thematic coding, guided by key concepts of hegemonic masculinity and queer theory. The analysis is interpretive and critical, aiming to offer a culturally grounded reading of masculinity as mediated through streaming series that is being dramatized

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis and Interpretation of Hegemonic Masculinity in Jeffrey Dahmer’s Character

This study analyses the depiction of Dahmer’s masculinity in the series *Dahmer – Monster* by applying Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity and Butler’s theory of gender performativity. Although Dahmer occupies a marginalized position through his queer identity, his behaviours reflected in his criminal acts reflect the notion of hegemonic masculinity. The following table summarizes scenes selected for analysis, identifying the traits of masculinity as well as offering an initial queer theory interpretation:

Table 1. Masculinity traits and performativity analysis and interpretation of the scenes

Scenes (episode)	Masculinity traits interpretation	Performativity analysis and interpretation
Dahmer luring his victims to be photographed in his room, which later drugging them (eps. 1 – 5)	Domination, physical control, emotional detachment	Repeated acts of domination perform masculinity as control over vulnerable parties
Dahmer’s childhood scenes with his father to encourage his ‘manly’ behavior (eps. 2 – 3)	Traditional masculinity, toxic masculinity, hegemonic masculinity	Performances of masculinity are shaped by family; there is a certain pressure to suppress emotion for young boys
Dahmer’s childhood trauma (eps. 2)	Emotional suppression.	Trauma initiates the emotional disconnection and self-isolation
Dahmer keeping all of his victims’ body parts (eps. 1, 4, 5)	Possessive, obsession, desire of ownership.	Performances of the eternal possession fantasy and masculine domination
Dahmer trying to create “zombie” lovers and altars (eps. 7)	Obsessive, total control.	Embodies extreme masculine control to counter emotional vulnerability
Dahmer’s relationship with Tony Hughes (eps. 6)	Fragile masculinity, fear of abandonment	Vulnerability is performed but collapses into a violent act of control and fear abandonment, illustrating masculinity traits on dominance

The analysis of Dahmer’s character depicts in *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* reveals that Dahmer’s masculinity is performed primarily through acts of domination, emotional detachment, and physical control. Dahmer’s actions throughout the series reaffirm patriarchal ideal of masculinity. His portrayal on screen sometimes being exaggerated, but still reflecting the traits of traditional masculinity within the personality of serial killers (Krammer, 2024). The concept of traditional masculinity refers to a set of behaviors and roles associated with manhood within

particular cultures. The focus of traditional masculinity is the notion of stoicism, dominance, and aggressive (Merdassa, 2024).

According to American Psychological Association (2018), traditional masculinity refers to “a particular constellation of standards that possess particular traits including anti-femininity, despise the appearance of weakness, adventurous, risk, and violence”. Traditional masculinity ideology can be seen as the dominant form of masculine type, as men are expected to be the protectors and providers. Historically speaking, men are expected to have survival and societal roles as they were the breadwinner of the house. Traditional masculine traits contribute to shape the male identity, as it becomes the stereotypical gender role that every man should have, which also constructed by the society (Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021).

Discussion: Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender Performativity in Dahmer – Monster



Figure 1. Still cut from ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ Eps. 1 “Bad Meat” (Source: Netflix)

Jeffrey Dahmer’s crime involve extreme measures of control over his victims, including drugging, restraining, and eventually killing them, despite his shyness and awkward personality. To lure his victims, he frequently goes to public spaces, such as bars, clubs, and bus stops, providing them with opportunities to encounter men who were socially active and potentially open to his propositions (Nichols, 2006). Figure 1 illustrates how Dahmer talks to his to-be-victim by approaching them in the gay bar, buying them a drink, then asking if they want to do a paid photograph in his apartment. In one of interview—also referred in the series, he confessed that he did all of the murder because he grew obsession over them and wanted to possess them.



Figure 2. Still cut from ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ Eps. 5 “Blood on Their Hands” (Source: Netflix)

Nichols (2006) elaborates how Dahmer drugged and sedated his victims, as quoted:

“He ground his sedative tablets into powder before leaving home. Having the powder in a glass before going out, he could simply add beer, spirits, or coffee to prepare a sleeping potion once he had returned with a victim. He would ‘pump himself up’ with gay porno films before cruising” (2006; p. 244).

As showed in the figure 2, Dahmer was very careful and calculative. He prepared the sedative to make his way drugged his victim. Before he sedated his victims, he talked with his victim about his struggles and misfortunate to build closure and trust between them (Nichols, 2006). He occasionally took polaroid photos—as he offers some of the victims to pose and then pay them money. His interactions with his victims, including luring, drugging, murdering, and preserving body parts, are not just criminal behaviour, but it indicates his repeated assertions of power, dominance, and emotional detachment to the victim, even he considers as socially marginalized due to his sexuality.



Figure 3. Still cut from ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ Eps. 4 “The Good Boy Box” (Source: Netflix)

In ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Story of Jeffrey Dahmer’, some of traditional masculine traits are depicted in overt way providing a complex portrayal of notorious killer himself. He stated in the interview that he “wanted to control them and possess them permanently” by saving body parts, such as skulls and skeletons as “his way of remembering their appearance and physical beauty of their victims, as a form of memorial” (Inside Edition, 2018) as depicted in the figure 3, where Dahmer held the head of his victim. His actions included dismemberment and cannibalism, to which showing the extreme desire to dominate and possess his victims. Quoting from his statement from the interview of Jeffrey Dahmer as “the Milwaukee Cannibal” back then in 1993:

“I had these obsessive desire and thoughts wanting to control them to possess them permanently, not because I was angry with them, not because I hated them, but because I wanted to keep them with me. And as my obsession grew, I was saving body parts, such as skulls and skeletons” (Inside Edition, 2018).

Other than body parts, Dahmer also takes pictures of his soon-to-be-victim before executing and dismembering them. The series ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Story of Jeffrey Dahmer’ frequently shows Dahmer’s methods of controlling his victims, from flirting in the bar to luring them to follow him to his apartment. These traits of possession, domination, aggression, and obsession legitimizing the notion of hegemonic masculinity defined by Connell (Jabeen, 2018). Although Dahmer’s masculinity is performed through a queer lens, it doesn’t affect to the nature of his violence actions.



Figure 4. Still cut from ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ Eps. 6 “Silenced” (Source: Netflix)

In the episode 6, Dahmer even make a closer move to get closure with one of his victims, Tony Hughes—Dahmer’s twelfth victim who was deaf. Dahmer’s actions highlight his desire for absolute dominance over his victims, showing his role as the alpha men. It shows a tragic relationship between Dahmer and Hughes which might disrupt Dahmer’s trait of hegemonic masculinity. Both traditional and hegemonic masculinity limits men to express their emotion and perpetuate men to respond and acknowledge their own feeling (Malonda-Vidal et al., 2021: 2). Harris (2021) explains that showing emotion and vulnerability also showing men’s weakness. Men typically do not grow their ability to feel emotion because it may reduce the value of masculinity of males (2021: 10). Quoting from Harris:

“Expressing emotion is a sign of weakness and is discouraged, while emotional detachment is a sign of strength and is encouraged... The expectation of males to suppress vulnerable feelings and emotions creates a strict set of behaviors that males must follow, which includes avoidance of seeking help for emotional distress” (pp. 10 – 11).

Dahmer’s momentary tenderness with Tony, which is quite rare in the series, suggests the most tragic indictment of hegemonic masculinity. Dahmer’s genuine connection and fleeting moment with Hughes might rapture his violent performance, yet in the end, he kills Tony, reasserting his dominance and fear of abandonment. Butler’s theory further explains this as a crisis of performativity, where the repeated habit is nearly breakable by an unpredictable course of event (Boucher, 2006), in this case is vulnerability toward Hughes. The inability to explore their own emotion can cause to further damage in the future. His father’s encouragement and family trauma

might be one of the reasons why Dahmer ended up being emotionally isolated and uptight.



**Figure 5. Still cut from ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ Eps. 2
“Please Don’t Go” (Source: Netflix)**

In episode 2, it shows the glimpse of Dahmer’s childhood where his parents are mostly neglected Dahmer, both physically and emotionally. Chéze (2009) stated that Lionel, Dahmer’s father had to work and finish his Ph.D., while Joyce, Dahmer’s mother, were mentally unstable, suicidal, and depressive because of having to experience another pregnancy, which believed that Jeffrey felt ignored and neglected, especially after his little brother was born. Despite of his parent’s broken marriage, his father attempts to make Jeff to man up by showing him taxidermy (Figure 5.) and buried his emotional withdrawal. His encouragement of taxidermy and dismissal of Jeffrey’s feelings and emotional struggles illustrates that hegemonic masculinity is reproduced intergenerationally (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This points out Connell’s argument on hegemonic masculinity that it is culturally introduced and enforced to create patriarchy (Demetriou, 2001). Dahmer’s emotional repression led to his isolation and alienation in the society. He also did not have any friend at school, nor his neighborhood. This highlights all the repeated performances (Butler, 1988) of emotional detachment yet on the other hand, he craved for attention and desire of ownership. His emotional struggle may cause him to commit horrendous murders.

The aggression and violence depict in ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ is beyond monstrous. Moreover, Lionel’s repression toward Jeffrey is caused by his own struggles with his masculine identity, such as anger issues, failed marriage, and his own ego as a breadwinner. It causes Lionel to dump his struggles to Jeffrey, which fits to Butler’s definition of melancholic masculinity. Butler (1999) interprets Freud’s theory of melancholy, and later defines it as: “*a result of the internalization that becomes a strategy of magically resuscitating the lost object because the ambivalence felt toward the object requires that the object be retained until differences are settled*” (1999; pp. 78-79), which fits to the case of Jeffrey’s crime that emerge from the impossible demand to embody his father’s expectation of manhood.



Figure 6. Still cut from ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story’ Eps. 6 “Silenced” (Source: Netflix)

The series portrays multiple disturbing scenes, including sexual and mature contents. Violence acts commit by Dahmer portray his peak achievement of dominance, the needs of complete ownership of the victims. In every episode, when Dahmer murders his victim, the scenes show the horrific acts sequence by sequence. Starting with his obsession to dissolve roadkill in his childhood, Dahmer grows affection in dismembering body parts, even with his victims. Ramsland (2010) underlines the action of dismembering body parts could represent an attempt to maintain a sense of control, even in death, over his victims. Quoting from Ramsland (2010): “dismemberment might also indicate a morbid fascination with the human body, a fascination explored by some serial killers who see a deeper understanding of their victim beyond the living persona” (2010: pp. 89). He kept the head, skulls, bones, hearts, genitalia, and some of the meat of his victims that later he consumes (Figure. 6). Gerard Boyle, Dahmer’s attorney stated that Jeffrey did not want to stop creating these corpse lovers from the people that he thought were there for him—he wanted them to be part of him, that’s why he ate the dismembered body parts of his victims (Nichols, 2006). Dahmer’s attempts to lobotomize and consume his victims reflect an extreme form of hegemonic masculine possession and domination (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yang, 2020). His desire to own his victim by preserving body parts, creating corpse lover, and consuming them proves Dahmer’s traits of objectification of other parties to sustain their presence around him, confirming that “hegemony is about the mechanism of domination rather than qualities internal to a single masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Yang, 2020). These performances show how Dahmer’s fear and vulnerability masked by control and domination in the form of repeated performativity to stabilize his fragile masculinity identity.

Across the narrative and crime storytelling of *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022), it reveals that Dahmer’s character consistently embodies traits of hegemonic masculinity through acts of domination, emotional detachment, violence, obsession, and emotional suppression. His heinous crimes are constructed by multiple repeated performances (Butler, 1988) that support his masculine identity in society (Connell, 1998) in accordance with the expectation of male power. Dahmer’s queerness does not affect to his nature of masculinity. His gender and sexual performances demonstrate that queer identity can coexist with dominant masculinity when channeled through acts of possession, domination, and control (Barnard, 2000).

Each ritual—from luring the victim to postmortem acts—illustrate that masculinity is constantly performed, repeated, and reinforced through violent domination and non-heteronormative identities.

Dahmer's Strategic Gender Performance and Queer Identity

The character of Jeffrey Dahmer in *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022) presents a compelling case study of the interplay between hegemonic masculinity and gender performativity, illustrating how masculinity is both constructed through repeated performances of domination. Dahmer's criminal acts, including luring, drugging, dismembering, and cannibalism, reveal an extreme enactment of patriarchal power, wherein his need for absolute control over his victims reflects Connell's framework of hegemonic masculinity as a system of dominance reliant of violence (Schmidt, 1994). Moreover, Dahmer's queer identity and his performance of masculinity simultaneously exploited and concealed his sexual orientation as homosexual man. His queerness does not seem to disrupt the traditional notions of masculinity, instead reveal a calculated manipulation of perception toward gay men among the society through violence, as Butler stated “*gender is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed*” (Butler, 1988). His queerness served as a tactical tool by embodying the stereotype of harmless, socially awkward white gay man so that he can evade suspicion long enough to sustain his killing spree, especially his decision to live in the Black neighborhood, make him nearly invisible (King-Carroll, 2022).

Furthermore, it is revealed that Dahmer performs a series of repeated acts to produce the illusion of a stable masculine identity (Boucher, 2006; Butler, 1988). Each violent act becomes a ritualized performance where power is asserted, and vulnerability is suppressed (Schlesinger et al., 2010). His desire is not expressed through relational intimacy, instead the acts of possession and domination, which demonstrates that his queer identity does not dismantle his patriarchal power but adapts to them. Dahmer's performance through emotional closure of his victims prior his action becomes the strategy to control and objectify them, which is affirmed his masculine identity yet still showing a hint of his queerness. Importantly, his marginalized sexuality does not exclude him from performing masculinity in ways that align with patriarchal expectations, yet it indicates that the performance of hegemonic masculinity can be redefined across different sexual orientations (Butler, 1988; He, 2017; Yang, 2020). Through Dahmer's actions, the series suggests that masculinity, as a social structure, can transcend the boundaries of heterosexual norms, and that queer individuals can still perform and reinforce acts of domination, emotional repression, and control that traditionally associated with male power. This result challenges the binaries between queerness and masculinity, revealing that power structures of gender and domination persist even with marginalized sexual.

CONCLUSION

This research explores that Jeffrey Dahmer's character in *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022) series portrays Dahmer's masculinity through consistent performance of hegemonic traits, such as domination, control, power, and obsession. Despite Dahmer's marginalized sexual identity as a queer man, his behaviors align with the traits of hegemonic masculinity rather than challenging it. Through the lens of Connell's hegemonic theory and Butler's theory of gender performativity, the analysis reveals that Dahmer's crimes are not merely random acts of violence, but ritualized and repeated performances that confirm his masculine identity through control and domination over his victims. The results show that queerness does not inherently subvert patriarchal structure, instead, it can coexist and reinforce hegemonic masculinity when mediated through several traits of masculine behaviors, such as possession and objectification. These results have important implication for both academic field of gender, media, and cultural studies, and the broader public understanding of crime narratives. Scholars and audiences are able to reconsider the assumption toward marginalized identities and recognize how narratives of violence can challenge traditional gender hierarchies and stereotypes in non-heteronormative context. Future research could examine how marginalized perpetrators and/or victims are portrayed differently depending on their identities. Further studies could also investigate how such portrayals affect public perceptions toward the perpetrators across various cultural context.

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