Tell Me a Story: MMPI Responses and Personal Biography in the Case of a Serial Killer

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The interpretation of MMPI (Hathaway & McKinley, 1943) profiles has emphasized a language of pathological attribution that often serves the interests of clinical description and actuarial prediction better than those of individual case formulation and an understanding of the adaptive forces involved in the production of symptomatic behavior. In this article, I illustrate a contrasting approach, one that emphasizes MMPI items and scales as instruments of personal biography, with the case of the serial murderer Jeffrey Dahmer.

In the method of contrasted groups used to develop the standard clinical scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI; Hathaway & McKinley, 1943), a kind of statistical chasm lies between, for example, a group of somatic converters and another group of people who, so far as is known, are not somatic converters. This chasm, a realm of proportionate differences in item endorsement rates, is devoid of flesh and history, of suffering and aspiration. The real people, those standing on either side, the embodiments, respectively, of the criterion and the norm, have been swept out of the MMPI and back into their own lives and histories. One is left with the inanimate body of norms and metrics to wait for the next new life to fill in the spaces with a No. 2 pencil.

The technique of MMPI interpretation has long rested on a foundation of mostly pathological descriptors, the so-called empirical correlates, these in turn also having been developed using group contrast methods. In general, this technique has served well the purposes of clinical description and actuarial prediction. However, like all fundamentally nomothetic methods, this one places a premium on surface characteristics (e.g., panicky, paranoid, passive, perfectionistic, phobic, promiscuous, prudish, psychopathic, psychotic, pugnacious, punitive) while affording little basis for understanding how such characteristics came to describe a given individual and the adaptive role they may serve in the present.

In his multilevel conception of personality, Leary (1956, 1957) referred to his Level I as “public communication,” emphasizing the observable characteristics of personality, those manifested in the interpersonal impact the participant has on others—the participant’s social stimulus value. Leary accepted the MMPI (Level I–M) as one of the sources of data contributing to description at this level along with behavioral ratings of interaction with others, sociograms, and choices or reactions in standardized interpersonal situations. Specifically, the MMPI was said to depict “the interpersonal pressure exerted on the clinician by the patient’s symptoms” (Leary, 1957, p. 78).

At the time Leary worked with the MMPI, he was solely concerned with the standard clinical scales, which in turn had their origins in the method of contrasted groups. Recall that for these scales, item content did not matter. What mattered was interpersonal impact and the behavior of marking items True or False.

A decade later, Wiggins (1966) recast the MMPI into Leary’s Level II, the level of conscious description, in his “Substantive Dimensions of Self-Report in the MMPI Item Pool.” In Level II, the values attached to item content and item marking behavior are reversed. The question now is not how the individual affects or is seen by others but how persons see themselves in their worlds. In this conception, the MMPI is seen as an elicitation of the individual’s phenomenological field in which the items can be seen as the far-flung elements of narrative, the scales as structures that may help to organize these elements into a coherent plot.

Bateson (1979) said the “story is a little knot or complex of that species of connectedness which we call relevance” (p. 13). Bateson went on to point out that this connectedness applies to A and B insofar as they are components in the same story and to people who, he said, all think in terms of stories.
A story, Bateson said, “is pattern through time” (p. 14). Patients come. They bring stories, and the therapeutic encounter is vitally about the points of contact between the patient’s stories and those of the therapist. The conception of personality assessment I emphasize in the following rests on the apprehension, if necessary the construction, of stories.

The stories brought to psychologists are not simply the tales stacked in memory waiting to be spun at the clinician’s downbeat. Rather, the patient is suffused with them. They are in his gait and hair, they are in her gaze and facies, in his arriving late for the hour, in the order of the tales she spins, in his ready acceptance of the therapist’s wisdom, and in the secrets she keeps. They are in the white knuckles that reveal that facial reddening is anger rather than the blush of modesty and in the context created by the sequence of exchanges that is the background of Mr. or Ms. Redface’s frustration, humiliation, injury, or whatever. They are in the increased blood flow to the peripheral vasculature of the face that helps Redface to cool down, to maintain overall temperature within homeostatic limits. Surely they are also in the responses he or she makes to the MMPI items.

The job is similar to that of the archeologist who must breathe life into a motley collection of femur, tooth, point, a length of braided jute, and potsherd. Story is all, with everything not only connected to everything else but defined by everything else. Think paper, stone, and scissors.

However, if one wishes to tweak the MMPI for stories, the usual guides and manuals will not help much. One finds no notion of story there, of what happened when or led to this. As Leary knew, one finds only surfaces there. Is the person active or passive? Paranoid or depressed? Attached or alienated? Forward or shy? Alert or sluggish? Try seeing a person within this level of description. At most, something goes fleeting by, a ghost, a fragment of memory, but no story. For that one needs history and a sense of the connection between things: pattern through time.

Interpretive guidebooks meet the need for nomothetic description and that level of clinical prediction that goes with the odds. However, at this level, one is practicing a species of clinical sociology in which the emphasis is on sorting, and it is statistics that tell the tale. The move to idiographic comprehension, the domain of the story, and that of the practice of clinical psychology entails a decline in the role of statistics and an upsurge in a different set of evaluative criteria, a corpus the rules for which reside in a realm that resists codification. These criteria are invoked in the common distinction between the science and the art of clinical practice. That is, the criteria employed in the apprehension and construction of the patient’s story are aesthetic and operate to nudge the harmonies and resonances that emerge in the witnessing participation of the clinician with the patient as he or she relates the stories that enclose his or her central metaphor.

In his classic, “The Dynamics of ‘Structured’ Personality Tests,” Meehl (1945) issued the statement that came to summarize the “official” attitude toward the test items for at least the next 25 years: “The scoring does not assume a valid self-rating to have been given” (p. 147). One need not look at the items or the patient’s responses to them because only the kernels of the contrasted groups methodology are worth keeping; all else is chaff. Wiggins (1991) coined the injunction that summarized the pedagogical consequence of this view in the words “No fair peeking.”

There had been a few peekers, of course. Grayson (1951) made a list of red flag items, and Harris and Lingo (1968) developed rational subscales, each with norms and a handy name such as Poignancy, one function of which was to forestall more detailed peeking. It was only with the publication of Wiggins’s (1966) monograph, 20 years after Meehl’s (1945) discouraging word, that the peekers could stand up and be counted.1

I call your attention to the analogy between the empirical keying purists versus the peekers on one hand and the technical versus the fundamental analysts that congregate in the financial districts east of Minnesota. The technical analysts look at charts and graphs, calculate ratios, discounts and spreads, watch the volume, and follow the money. Like the empirical purists, they do not care about the product (content); they toss away the ballot and watch how the feet vote. The fundamentalists, like the peekers, like to know whether the company is making buggy whips or microchips. In what follows, I am going to do a lot of peeking.

Because of the unreliability of item responses, these cannot generally serve the traditional purposes of the MMPI: clinical prediction and personality description. However, these are not the only goals of assessment. In its broadest sense, personality assessment is the study of an individual life in all its developmental, adaptive, and pathological aspects or at least is one approach to such study.

Wiggins (1966) rightly noted the distortions that occur when the clinician’s access to the participant’s self-report must be mediated by the method of contrasted groups as is the case with the standard clinical scales of the MMPI. Scales developed by factorial or internal consistency methods reduce, but do not eliminate, distortion in self-report. For both methods, personal individuality is submerged in the process of forming the group, whether the one to be compared with another or the one whose responses are fed, en masse, into the analytical engine.

The only immediate access to the participant’s self-report on the MMPI is through the items themselves. At this level, the MMPI becomes less a predictive or descriptive modality than an expressive one in which the participant’s responses are not digitized for mechanical processing but engaged by the harmonies and resonances of the interpreter. The expression of self in the MMPI item pool is different from storytelling because the elements of

1However, see also a neglected contemporary contribution by Gough (1965).
narrative are out of order and widely dispersed and because the number of stories there cannot be counted. The participant cannot select which stories will be told or how many. In any but the most coarctated protocols, his or her planning around what will be revealed will be irrelevant and in any case, will not be met by the automated bean counter but by another person with stories of his or her own. As in the formal analysis of the MMPI, the data must still be selected, organized, and interpreted. In the context of expression, however, these tasks will be achieved through a personal encounter with the expressive product in which the interpreter’s values, esthetics, intuition, and life experience are the crux of method. This contrasts with routine interpretive procedure in which selection and organization are purely mechanical operations, and it is only when the task of interpretation is reached that the clinician’s personal attributes may be brought into play, a point at which, it might be presumed, they can do relatively little harm.

I illustrate the potential of an item-centered understanding of the MMPI protocol with the case of a serial murderer. Specifically, I relate his history and circumstances and, simultaneously, present what I have understood to be his own presentation of these matters as he has been able to relate them in the MMPI item pool. Both sources of information will help to understand the participant within the context of his own life and the acts for which he was imprisoned.

On July 22, 1991, a pale, hazel eyed, sandy haired, lean, tall, well built, soft-spoken 31-year-old man was arrested in one-bedroom apartment No. 213 at the Oxford Apartments, a low-rise brick building of 49 units; he was its only White tenant. The Oxford was situated near Marquette University in a heavily patrolled, poor, mostly Black neighborhood, its streets prowled by gangs, hookers, and drug dealers. Described as mild mannered and outwardly harmless, he was well spoken and, at least superficially, socially confident and skillful. His MMPI item responses endorse not minding conversation and sustain it when he does so (292F/265F, 180F/167F), making friends as quickly as others (309/280), meeting strangers (479F/360F), being inclined to initiate presentation of these matters as he has been able to relate them in the MMPI item pool. Both sources of information will help to understand the participant within the context of his own life and the acts for which he was imprisoned.

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He presented himself to potential victims with flattery, for example, “Hi, I'm Jeff. I like the way you dance,” or “You’re the nicest guy I’ve met in Milwaukee” (Mathews & Springen, 1992, p. 45). He was subsequently charged with 13 counts of first-degree intentional homicide and two counts of first-degree murder for killing 10 Black, three White, two Hispanic, one Native American, and one Lao-tian victims between the ages of 14 and 33. Because the accused wished to assist the investigation as much as possible following his arrest, he provided the circumstances of the deaths of two other victims, for a total of 17 in all. At the time of his arrest, the remains of 11 of his guests, including 4 severed and refrigerated human heads, and 7 skulls, were found on his premises.

He typically found his victims at gay bars, bus stops, or shopping malls, luring them home by offering to pay them for sex or to pose for photographs. Once home, according to those who escaped his apartment with their lives, their host showed gay videos, the Exorcist movies, talked to them mostly about his misfortunes, took Polaroid photos, and grew panicky when they moved to leave. Those who did not escape were served beverages laced with sedatives, strangled, and dismembered. The latter task was performed in the nude because it was, he said, “quite messy.” Yet he denied that seeing blood made him ill or is frightening (128/115). In its course he felt excitement over being in such exalted control, the fear of discovery, and profound loss. The heads were boiled to remove the attached flesh so that the skulls could be retained as the “true essence” of those he brought home. Some were covered with gray paint to look plastic. He envisioned a shrine in his bedroom, a black oblong table, flanked by skeletons, a row of skulls from end to end and bound by incense burners, and a lamp with blue globe lights to shine down at the griffin in its center. The purpose of the shrine was to make him feel close to his victims. It would sharpen his memory of them and the times they had had together.

The photographs taken of his victims were an integral part of his modus operandi. They helped him to “preserve” his guests, acted as a tonic to his fantasy, and enhanced his feelings of closeness. He posed and photographed his victims extensively in the course of hosting them, dismembering them, and to record certain arrangements of body parts such as hands and genitals that he felt had a pleasing effect. At times, he would wait for rigor mortis to set in to capture a corpse in a standing position.

He was careful: 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 porn films before cruising. He murdered on weekends so as not to miss work and to be able to spend more time with the corpse, and he selected victims who appeared harmless, gay, vulnerable, and without...
cars. Although 10 of his 17 victims were Black, he cared little about race, intelligence, or other demographic factors as long as they conformed to his preferred body type—medium height, slim build, smooth skin, and especially, a gracile craniofacial morphology (Bennett, 1993).

He practiced safe sex and admitted to worry about catching diseases (131F/118F), always using condoms when engaging in sex with his guests or their corpses (he admitted to engaging in unusual sex practices [133F/121F]) to prevent AIDS and other STDs. His cognitive organization was sufficiently intact that he was able to persuade two Milwaukee police officers to return an escaping victim to him after neighbors called 911 in the early morning hours of May 27, 1991, to report a man chasing a 14-year-old Asian boy who was naked and bleeding. In the course of their response, the police entered the man’s apartment, the stench from which neighbors had complained of for months, and failed to find anything amiss despite the presence of the corpse of a previous victim decomposing in his bedroom. Such was his ability to remain controlled and convincing under pressure. On his senior class trip to Washington, DC, he smoothly charmed his way into the offices of Vice-President Walter Mondale and Art Buchwald (Davis, 1991, p. 28).

He was security conscious; he installed two alarm systems and an artificial surveillance camera in his apartment and an extra lock on his front door and admitted to worrying about whether he closed his windows and locked his door (270F/245F). A deadbolt lock was also affixed to his bedroom door, forestalling entry to a room that included his shrine table, grisly Polaroid images of dissection and dismemberment, and on more than one occasion, contained a corpse while a guest was being entertained in the living room.

Just before his sanity trial began in January 1992, Jeffrey Dahmer completed the MMPI for Samuel H. Friedman who later presented his findings to the jury at Dahmer’s sanity trial (see Figure 1). The Welsh code is 48**6*27’35’1–90/ F’K–/L.. This profile is one of the three or four most common 2-point codes in both inpatient and outpatient psychiatric settings, with peak elevations on the Psychopathic Deviate (Pd [4]) and Schizophrenia (Sc [8]) scales. In a Missouri sample of more than 10,000 patients, this code accounted for about 6% of the total (Hedlund & Won Cho, 1979). Of these, 66% were produced by men, the average age for whom was 29, which is 2 years younger than Dahmer.


4Although Dahmer’s victims can hardly be held responsible for their own deaths, it should not be assumed that they were all innocuous. Of his victims, 12 (71%) had criminal records, half of these for violent crime (Schwartz, 1992).

5Following his arrest, questions were raised with respect to Dahmer’s attitudes toward both Blacks and homosexuals and the role hatred may have played in the selection of the mostly Black and gay men who became his victims. Although he is reported to have made repeated racist and antigay slurs, and in different venues, the possibility that these were inspired by situational rather than attitudinal factors cannot be ruled out. Dahmer himself denied that bigotry of any kind influenced his choices of whom to invite to his apartment. Nor should the influence of demographics be overlooked. Housing in the area of Milwaukee where Dahmer lived was overwhelmingly occupied by renters. Median home value was about half of that for the city as a whole. Residents were largely poor and Black, with the ratio of Blacks to Whites almost 4:1 (Dvorchak & Holewa, 1991, p. 15; Jaeger & Balousek, 1991, p. 132). Hence, apart from his preferred build and craniofacial features, the parsimonious explanation for Dahmer’s choice of victims is that they were drawn from those that were most available: poor—the sums he offered his victim for Dahmer’s choice of victims is that they were drawn from proposals had, covertly if not explicitly, homosexual appeal.
needs for attention and affection. They see others as hostile, rejecting, and unreliable. Sexual deviation, the confusion of sexuality with aggression, defective empathy, and difficulties in the expression and control of anger are chronic problems. Crimes committed by such patients tend to be poorly planned and executed and may involve bizarre and violent behavior.

Dahmer’s profile emphasizes his alienation from others and from himself, a strongly depressive and hopeless orientation toward the world and his cohabitants, and specific paranoid fears of others’ hostility.

Born May 21, 1960, at 6 lb, 15 oz, 18½ inches, Jeffrey Dahmer was raised in a middle class, Protestant home. His father, Lionel, a PhD chemist, was reticent, analytical, career-minded, and nondemonstrative, a temperament better suited to his studies, laboratory, and work than to the emotional care of family. His mother, Joyce, the neglected daughter of a severe, domineering, and explosive alcoholic, was insecure, high-strung, and emotionally labile if not volatile but also fragile and prone to depression. She worked as a telephone operator before her marriage, later as a Teletype machine instructor. Until 1975, she did not drive. Both of German ancestry, Lionel entered the marriage a devout Lutheran but followed Joyce in becoming baptized in the fundamentalist Church of Christ some time after Jeffrey’s birth.

The pregnancy was unwanted by the father (Janz, 1993, p. 8A) and may have been unwanted by the mother as well. It was unplanned and difficult. There was morning sickness almost from the beginning, her nausea eventually becoming so severe that Joyce had great difficulty keeping food down. She is reported to have been taking prescription tranquilizers during her pregnancy (Dahmer, 1994, p. 234), perhaps including its first trimester (Norris, 1992, p. 59). She developed muscle spasms and rigidity in her jaw and legs severe enough to require injections of morphine and barbiturates for relief. Her sixth and seventh months were spent in bed; she had to quit her job.

Nevertheless, Jeffrey’s arrival was greeted joyfully, and Joyce faithfully and lovingly kept a journal detailing the progress of his growth for at least his first 6 years. There were problems from the beginning, however. For his first 4 months, Jeffrey wore a cast on one leg to correct a deformity. Breast-feeding and its scheduling demands made his mother irritable and nervous. It was abruptly discontinued shortly after Joyce and Jeffrey returned home from the hospital. Soon after Jeffrey’s birth, she was hospitalized for a severe postpartum depression. He later said this led him to feel responsible for the conflict he witnessed between his parents.

From what is known, Dahmer’s parents may have been compatible primarily in their energy for quarrel. Their frequent pattern of arguments apparently started well before Jeffrey’s birth. He remembers them “constantly at each other’s throats” (Masters, 1991, p. 185). As late as 1995, the two were in litigation over the disposition of their deceased son’s brain.

His mother was often physically or chemically unavailable, subject to multiple somatic complaints, and quick to take to bed. Jeffrey’s father spent a lot of time away from home. Until Jeffrey was 6½ years old, his father was absorbed in his graduate studies in chemistry. He later was known for working late in the evenings and being gone on long trips for PPG (formerly known as the Pittsburgh Plate Glass company). When home, he was often preoccupied with tending to his ailing wife and running errands. Nevertheless, Jeffrey’s first 3 years were mostly happy ones.

Toward the end of his third year, he came down with a series of infections — ear, throat, mild pneumonia — that caused him to cry through the night. His treatment required multiple injections until “his little buttocks were covered with injections,” leaving him enraged at the doctors and nurses who gave them (Dahmer, 1994, pp. 45–46). Two months short of his fourth birthday, he underwent surgery to repair a double hernia. He remembers having severe pain in his abdomen and groin. “He . . . asked Joyce if the doctors had cut off his penis” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 59).

It is known that operative procedures and hospitalization can reach traumatic significance in children, particularly those under 5 years of age (see, e.g., Blom, 1958, and referen...
How Dahmer was prepared for his surgery is unknown, yet it seems doubtful that either his unhappy, self-absorbed mother or his distant and unempathic father would have been equipped to provide a salubrious form to the understandings and expectations Jeffrey brought to this operation. Such disability may be somewhat the more surprising in his father’s case given his recollection of his own “extreme fear of abandonment [when as] a young boy … my mother went into the hospital for an operation” (Dahmer, 1994, pp. 216–217).

His hernia experience appears to have marked a turning point in Dahmer’s life. Following his return from the hospital, he became increasingly remote and his interests more solitary. His father describes his recovery as slow, his former vitality depleted and replaced by an “inner darkening” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 59), his affectivity flattened. “More than anything, he seemed to grow more inward, sitting quietly for long periods, hardly stirring, his face oddly motionless” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 59).

These reactions may be seen as an emotional retreat and gloomy withdrawal after not one but a succession of events that provide a basis for some of Dahmer’s later responses, insecurities, and patterns of interest. By the age of 4, he would have learned that his body was not quite his own. From his first 4 months in a leg cast through multiple hypodermic punctures when he was barely 3½ to the invasion of abdominal surgery with its threat of castration a few months later, his corporeal life was marked by episodes of immobility, pain, intrusion, and threat. The normal course of early childhood in which movement and mobility are a primary medium of expression and at the root of perceptual motor learning and provide the foundation for the child’s sense of wholeness, control, and agency and dominion as an intact being was disrupted. Aspects of corporeal existence that in the normal child are implicit, subliminal, and preverbal were awakened in Dahmer in painful ways. The body Dahmer knew as he entered middle childhood was compromised: a body that was a medium for pain; a body that did not work properly; a body from which important parts, even parts as distinctive and identifying as a penis, might be missing; a body whose visceral contents could not be taken for granted; a body to be subjected to rather than owned; a body, therefore, as a container of questions and at the root of a weighty and diffuse sense of alienation and of loss.

If his parents were less than responsive in providing adequate emotional care, they also seem deficient when it came to guidance and structure in the form of discipline. Although he described neither of his parents as forcing his obedience unreasonably (327F/297F), of the two parents, if his father was the stricter, Jeffrey apparently did not feel that he was excessively so (458F/425F). Lionel would occasionally voice disapproval (Dahmer has described him as “controlling”; Baumann, 1991, p. 121), but a system of genuine limits and consequences was lacking. Nevertheless, if Jeffrey concealed or lied about his actions, these measures would have been taken with his father in mind. There is also a suggestion that he may have felt closer to his father than to his mother (562F/473F).

In trying to understand the adult Dahmer became, one expects a tale of childhood trauma and an extensive one at that, but there are no indications that his parents were physically or sexually abusive. Although his father reported that Jeffrey had been sexually abused by a neighbor boy at age 8, Dahmer denies any such event. However, between the mother’s distresses and self-preoccupation, the father’s emotional inaccessibility and absences, and the parents’ quarreling when both were home, little time was devoted to Jeffrey’s care. He remembers growing up in neglect and isolation. Little is known of the specifics of Dahmer’s childhood interactions with his parents. His mother may herself have felt abused or neglected in her marriage. Whether this distress affected indifference, neglectful inattentiveness, depressive under-involvement, perfunctory caretaking, joyless engagement, or resentful self-sacrifice vis-à-vis her son is unclear. What is reasonably clear is that Dahmer was deprived of those experiences that foster attachment and a sense of safety. The experience of being warmly and attentively held, of being provided eager and plentiful soothing, of being engaged in loving play and conversation, of having his signals noticed and followed up, of having his preferences enthusiastically honored, of having his suffering bring sadness and vital concern to another; what is known suggests that these goods of adequate parenting were available, at best, in insufficient supply. He describes a depleted and damaging emotional environment: feeling lonely much of the time, even when in the company of others (305/277); feeling that no one under-

includes cited therein).
stands him (24/22); having been disappointed in love (239/219); having an unsatisfactory sex life (20/12); and longing to be as happy as others seem to be (67/56).

These items, all from Pd4A (Social Alienation), reflect the effects of this deprivation. His responses relate that such goods as sexual satisfaction, feeling understood by others, average happiness, success in loving, and a sense of togetherness with others, goods provided in the normal or “good enough” rearing environment, failed to reach him.

The home atmosphere worsened after the birth of his brother David, the name chosen by Jeffrey, when Jeffrey was 6. Lionel extended his time spent at work to escape the turmoil that had become a staple of his life when at home. Joyce’s second pregnancy was as difficult as her first. She took meprobamate (Equanil®) at a rate of two to three tablets a day, then three to five, for her nervousness, insomnia, and irritability but with no clearly beneficial effect. Jeffrey’s first grade teacher’s report made at this time described him as feeling “neglected.” David was reportedly the recipient of much “demonstrative affection” that could only have aggravated Jeffrey’s sense of isolation and unworthiness. This would have made Jeffrey the “unfavored sibling,” a target of invidious comparison for himself if not for others. Or perhaps he was less an unfavored child than something of an oedipal castoff. Attention to David would surely underscore for Jeffrey his neglect-worthy badness and the defectiveness that his encounters with medical treatment confirmed for him 3 years earlier, at least as much as his parents’ inadequacies. He had no close friends or other affectionate relationships to which to turn for the solace that was missing at home. There were efforts to connect, but their failures were painful. In one episode in Barberton, to which the family had moved just before Jeffrey’s 7th birthday, in the midst of horseplay with a group of peers, it was suggested that they find what it would be like to strangle each other. One boy, whom Jeffrey thought friendly, offered himself for this purpose and promised not to tell the teacher. However, when Jeffrey put his hands to the boy’s neck and squeezed, the boy immediately betrayed him to the teacher who administered a paddling. In another episode the same year, Jeffrey became attached to an assistant teacher and caught some tadpoles to paddling. In another episode the same year, Jeffrey became attached to an assistant teacher and caught some tadpoles to

The turn to fantasy to fill the voids in his life occurred early. His fascination with animals began in Ames, Iowa, where the family lived while Lionel pursued the PhD. He was initially captivated by a large pile of rodent bones his father had excavated from under their home a few months after Jeffrey’s hernia operation. At age 5 years, 4 months, his mother wrote in Jeffrey’s baby book “Has a great interest in insects and animal life” (Janz, 1993, p. 8A). He saw barnyard animals at a radiation research station on the outskirts of Ames and spent time there “watching and staring” (Masters, 1993, p. 31). In deserted buildings, he found hornets, rats, and mice. Elsewhere, he found snakes, wild rabbits, toads, crabs, turtles, and fish. He would feel the bones inside the animals he picked up, alive or dead. At age 10, his father gave him a chemistry set through which he learned about several compounds and their uses. Jeffrey showed his father a welcome curiosity after one evening meal when he asked him about the effect of putting chicken bones in bleach. Chemicals found in Apartment 213 included chloroform and ether, formaldehyde for those parts of his victims he wished to preserve, muriatic acid for those he did not. Other related possessions included rubbing alcohol, bleach, Lysol® spray, Pine-Sol®, Soilex, a solvent mostly used to remove wallpaper, an electric drill, and three power saws.

By early adolescence, Dahmer had begun to experiment with animals. At first he bleached chicken bones or dropped insects into formaldehyde. He then graduated to the small animals, squirrels, chipmunks, and small birds that lived in the woods of the family property. He collected their skulls, sometimes impaling them on the small crosses he used to mark their graves in a burial patch he created. Later he dissected animals, “road kill,” dogs, cats, opossums, rabbits, foxes, raccoons on which he used tools and chemical supplies to skin them and clean their skeletons. Sometimes he would show animals’ internal organs to his brother in the course of a dissection. At age 15, he found a dog and mounted its head on a stick next to a cross in the woods behind his home. “The body, skinned and gutted” (Chin & Tamarkin, 1991, p. 36), was nailed to a tree. His fascination was specifically with the insides of animals, their viscera, and seeing how they worked. He recalls being entranced by the bright, orange-colored egg sac that fell out as he watched his father slit open a bluegill. Just as he had done with his mother during her pregnancy with David and with some of his acquaintances in childhood, he often pressed his head to the chests and abdomens of his guests to hear their hearts beat or their bowels rumble. He would report being aroused by the heat released by a corpse when cut open.

Dahmer’s postmortem activity with human remains was, apart from the sexual, little changed from his handling of road kill in his youth: cutting open, dissecting, dismembering, skinning, discarding, saving, displaying. These aspects stayed constant. One may wonder if his interest in how the
animals and humans he dissected worked expressed a deeper question, one that reached out for self-understanding: “What is it in me that is broken?”

The onset of his animal experimentation seemed to hasten the inauguration of masturbation. Initially, Dahmer would masturbate to fantasies of animal parts. By age 13, he had recognized a homosexual inclination and commenced daily masturbation to sexual fantasies of male peers. At about age 14, he began to consider the sexual potential of corpses. At age 15, he daydreamed about killing and having sex with a young jogger who regularly passed by his home. One day he waited with a baseball bat in bushes by the roadside for his prospective victim to pass, but on that day, the jogger never appeared. There is no suggestion of any political dimension to Dahmer’s sexuality. Certainly he was not an advocate for gay rights; neither did he harbor any hostility toward gays if his public statements can be believed. Although he may have felt some anger that homosexual preference was his lot in life, there is little doubt that in most respects, he accepted a gay identity (69/NA, 430F/NA).

One who knew him has reported that

As a kid, Dahmer was a constant victim of torture, a scrawny geek with black horn rims and a slight lisp, he was easy prey for the playground predators in junior high, it only got worse … the cumulative effect of relentless humiliation and ostracism drove him to the edge of the abyss. (Derf, 2002, p. 3)

He remained friendless through high school. He played tennis and clarinet, but despite more than adequate intelligence—recent testing found an IQ of 121—he seemed unmotivated. His grades ranged from A to F, sometimes in the same subject. Although he viewed himself as being as smart and capable as others (122/109), he disliked school (173F/160F).

This may have been due, in part, to drinking or smoking marijuana before his classes. Regular drinking had been a staple in his life going back at least as far as age 12. While in high school, he said, his life "revolved totally around smoking pot" (Stingl, 1992a, pp. 1, 6), and he was known to regularly consume large quantities of beer before class, to keep liquor in his school locker, and to consume it even during classes (Schwartz, 1992, p. 40). On the MMPI, he endorsed using alcohol excessively (215/264, 460F/NA), sometimes in the point of blackouts (156/168, 7251/229), and to taking drugs or sleeping pills without a prescription (466F/429F). A high school acquaintance of the time reported that Dahmer consumed a six-pack in the friend’s car well before the end of a 10-min drive to the mall (Derf, 2002, p. 13).

Schoolmates describe a ritual walk he adopted on his way to the school bus consisting of four steps forward, two steps back, four steps forward, one step back, that persisted, without deviation, for days on end. In school, he hung around with the socially unfavored, seeking attention as a prankster. Classmates began to refer to “doing a Dahmer” for such antics as bleating like a sheep in class, tracing bodies on the floor in chalk, or simulating seizures or mental retardation in the hallways. A favorite was mimicking the slurred speech and spastic movements of his mother’s interior decorator who suffered from cerebral palsy. Such escapades would, of course, tend to disguise his frequent intoxication from others, but he admits they occasionally resulted in discipline (118/105) including suspension (56/84). However, Dahmer’s adoption of the clown role, although it may have drawn on an affinity for acting, was less exuberant than desperate, for although he admitted a taste for the dramatic (126/112), he disliked being made fun of (911/79F).

This point is evident in another clumsy attempt to be a part of a community. On this occasion, Jeffrey crashed group photographs of the Revere High School chapter of the National Honor Society. In the honor society photo ultimately published in his senior yearbook, Dahmer’s image is blacked out. However, this prank extended beyond the poignancy of his nonbelonging to the irony of his choice of which group to crash. Although he apparently had little time for Jeffrey, his father wanted him to excel and had always shown a keen interest in his son’s academic achievement. In crashing the honor society photographs, Dahmer could both attempt a counterfeit of something his father could be proud of and suffer a public humiliation for his failure to realize his father’s hopes for Jeffrey’s academic career.

At age 18, while Jeffrey was still in high school, Dahmer’s parents had retreated to opposite parts of the house to minimize the chance of contact with one another and were engaged in a bitter custody battle over his younger brother. Jeffrey was barely mentioned in court documents. Both parents were poised to move out. His father was the first to leave, moving to the Ohio Motel about 10 miles distant. Within 2 weeks following his graduation, his mother and David left to visit relatives in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, leaving Jeffrey to fend for himself. He remembers feeling a strong desire that others not leave him at that point and began hating to sleep alone at night. It was during this time, on June 18, 1978, that Jeffrey picked up a young man hitchhiking, Steven Hicks, and brought him home to drink beer. When Hicks announced plans to leave, he was struck in the head with barbells, strangled, and subsequently dismembered, his bones sledgehammered and his remains, no piece larger than a hand, strewn about nearby woods. As Dahmer later told police, “The guy wanted to leave and I didn’t want him to leave” (Schwartz, 1992, p. 43).

Within the month after the divorce was final, Joyce Dahmer gathered up her belongings and David and moved to Chippewa Falls without notifying either the court or Lionel

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1Dahmer and Steven Tuomi had met for sex at the Ambassador Hotel in Milwaukee in November 1987. They both got drunk on 151 proof rum and passed out. On awakening, Dahmer found himself lying on top of Tuomi’s bloody corpse.
in defiance of the court’s custody order (David’s custody later reverted to his father). She instructed Jeffrey not to reveal their whereabouts. According to his stepmother, “Jeffrey was left all alone in the house with no money, no food, and a broken refrigerator. The desertion really affected him” (Chin & Tamarkin, 1991, p. 34). (That her departure constituted desertion is disputed by Dahmer’s mother, however: “It’s not true that I abandoned him. I remember I begged Jeff to come with me, begged him” [Janz, 1993, p. 8A].)

In the Fall, at his father’s insistence, Dahmer enrolled at Ohio State University. He dropped out after one quarter, having earned only 2 hr of college credit and a cumulative GPA of .45. His heavy drinking throughout the term forestalled any academic progress, so, again at the encouragement of his father, he then joined the army for a 3-year hitch. His enlistment lasted barely years before he was discharged as an habitual drunkard. He would lie in bed listening to Black Sabbath through headphones and “guzzling” (Chin & Tamarkin, 1991, p. 34) beer or martinis until he passed out.

Assigned to Baumholder, West Germany, with the Eighth Infantry Division as a medical specialist, Dahmer’s barracks mates report that he underwent a dramatic change of character with intoxication: Normally a quiet loner, he became dogmatic, aggressive, defiant, menacing, overtalkative, moody, and tedious. Subsequent acquaintances confirm this general picture. One of his infantry bunkmates reported that “Beginning Friday afternoon he would drink, pass out, wake up and start again. He’d be in his own little world” (Chin & Tamarkin, 1991, p. 37). Another remarked, “You could tell in his face that he wasn’t joking. It was for real. That’s why it bothered me. It was a whole different side. His face was blank” (Masters, 1991, p. 266). His stepmother recalled, “He has a terrible drinking problem. It makes him a different person. He was a gentle person, but when he got drunk it would bother me. It was a whole different side. His face was blank” (Masters, 1991, p. 266). His stepmother recalled, “He has a terrible drinking problem. It makes him a different person. He was a gentle person, but when he got drunk it would take four policemen to hold him down,” (Prud’homme, 1991, p. 126) but also quiet and keeping to himself. His coworkers described him as aloof and friendless (Dvorchak & Holewa, 1991, p. 29).

During this period, he discovered bathhouses, where he may have had his first full sexual experience. There he had intercourse both passively and actively, although he disliked the former. His only complaint was that he wished his partners to be more still. He obtained a remedy for this problem on June 6, 1986, in the form of a prescription for sleeping pills (Masters, 1993, p. 93). In 25 trips to different pharmacies over a 5-year period, Dahmer would purchase 800 tablets of Halcion®, the soporific he chose to prepare his victims for strangling. In addition to bathhouses, he also frequented gay bars, often returning home with young men. By September 1988, when he moved out of his grandmother’s home, two of his guests had perished there.

He first became known to Wisconsin legal authorities in August 1982 when he was arrested by the State Fair Park police for disorderly conduct and ultimately convicted and fined. Not 5 years later, in March 1987, a conviction and a year of probation followed for disorderly conduct after an incident of exposure in which he urinated in front of some children. In 1988, he molested a 13-year-old Laotian boy, Sounthome Sinthasomphone, an older brother of Dahmer’s 13th victim, Konerak Sinthasomphone, after offering him $50 to pose for photographs and giving him a soporific. He subsequently pled guilty to charges of second-degree sexual assault (admits; 37F/34F) and enticement of a child for immoral purposes and was sentenced to 8 years. His expressions of remorse were sufficiently convincing that this sentence was reduced, contingent on no reoffense, to a year’s detention and 5 years probation. The detention allowed him to leave jail daily to work his $9.81/hour job as a mixer at the chocolate factory.

Dahmer was a loner. He denied being liked by most people who know him (54F/78F) and described himself as a loner by choice, having given up for the lack of success in sustaining relationships. So far as is known, Dahmer’s social life was largely limited to gay bars and bathhouses. There were apparently no enduring friendships of any kind. His longest known association lasted 10 weeks. He had no interest in women. His only heterosexual date had been with a 2-year’s younger classmate who accompanied Dahmer to the
Erikson’s (1950) construct of basic mistrust that was at stake. His central issue was “basically mistrusting” (Uebelherr, 1992, p. 6A). It was precisely his inability to connect that was “basically mistrusting” (Uebelherr, 1992, p. 6A). It was precisely his inability to connect that was his sense of mistrust, a well-known correlate of the 1992, p. 6A). It was precisely his inability to connect that was “basically mistrusting” (Uebelherr, 1992, p. 6A). It was precisely his inability to connect that was central to his sense of mistrust, a well-known correlate of the 48/84 profile. These items suggest that it was something like central to his sense of mistrust, a well-known correlate of the central to his sense of mistrust, a well-known correlate of the 48/84 profile.

Dahmer was a loner, but he was also lonely (305/277). He liked having people around him (312F/281F) and denied being happy when alone (286F/349F) or an ability to be happy living alone in a cabin in the woods (454F/NA).

To understand Dahmer’s loneliness, one must distinguish between its common and pathological forms: loneliness as being alone and in want of intimacy or at least company with others versus loneliness as an estrangement so thoroughgoing that the very basis for taking in interpersonal nourishment is lacking, when the hungers must be lived out in fantasy, and when leave-taking may be equated with abandonment and rejection.

Granting that all loneliness is miserable, it appears not the case that all loneliness is equally hopeless. Most people can and do find a safe place within themselves to which they can retreat as they review and assess themselves and their situations, troubleshoot past failures, and formulate plans for when they will stick their necks out again. Sometimes the failure was not their own, and no reassessment or reformulation is necessary, but they may still need to withdraw to a place where they can hold themselves in comfort and safety as they lick their wounds.

However, what if one has never known the kind of caretaking required to build that fortress within? Under these circumstances, one has no power to console and detoxify painful and frightening experiences. These experiences are not transformed into new resolve or reconciliation or forgiveness but remain crude and undigested. The inability to digest and transform such experience corrodes one’s sense of control or mastery and disrupts the feeling of coherence or harmony in one’s pattern in life. It creates a set of circumstances under which fantasy can successfully compete with the real world for those two essentials of survival: a sense of control over one’s destiny and a sense of meaning or purpose in living.

At some point in his life, the loneliness Dahmer knew became unrelieved and unrelievable. He could dance and drink, he could talk and carry on, but he could not connect. His worries persisted even when he was in the midst of lively friends (451F/363F), he felt understood by no one (24/22), and denied having ever been in love (324/291). Note that the sentiments expressed in the last two items are unequivocal.

According to a probation officer, Dahmer’s outlook toward other people was “basically mistrusting” (Uebelherr, 1992, p. 6A). It was precisely his inability to connect that was central to his sense of mistrust, a well-known correlate of the 48/84 profile. These items suggest that it was something like Erikson’s (1950) construct of basic mistrust that was at stake.

Dahmer did not view people as naturally deceitful. Whereas he felt it safer to trust nobody (265/241) and to be on his guard with people who were more friendly than he expected (348/315), he appeared not to view others as particularly deceitful (93F/81F) or as honest only when it served their selfish purposes (117F/104F). He did not fear that others would lie; he feared they would not care.

The turn to fantasy as a salve for the chronic abuse and/or deprivation experienced in real relationships makes possible a seduction, a trap, a runaway. Dahmer’s item responses suggest such a turn in him. He spent a lot of time in daydreaming (198F/184F), had strange and peculiar thoughts and experiences (349/316, 33/32), and occasionally thought of things too bad to talk about (15/16). One patient said to me, “Fantasy doesn’t let you down, it’s reliable, you get what you pay for.” However, fantasy is also an addiction. The turning away from others to concentrate on the inside exacts a toll in the atmosphere of social skills and in the loss of the occasional self-strengthening rewards that real interactions inevitably bring, at least in some measure. So one is thrown back into fantasy with progressively greater force and dependency, and the gulf that separates one from real people in real life widens and deepens. Concurrently, there is increasing disparity between one’s sense of personal power as it is manifested in fantasy versus real relationships. The unchallenged omnipotence one enjoys in fantasy contrasts with a deeply eroded vigor in real life. Interpersonal participation becomes mostly wan and passive, punctuated by occasional behavioral surges in an attempt to counteract the social self’s declining fortunes. Yet the decline in interpersonal skill and finesse will ensure that these flailings after a renewed sense of social potency will grow increasingly more awkward, embarrassing, pitiful, and desperate. In some cases, as the contrast between inner and outer worlds grows, the appetite of fantasy grows with it. Unless psychosis supervenes or the play of real events begins to restore balance, fantasy may turn voracious.

The chronology of Dahmer’s 17 murders is consistent with this pattern. The first occurred in 1978. The second occurred 9 years later in 1987. By April, 1989, the total was 5. In May, 1991, 2 years later, Dahmer claimed the life of Konerak Sinthasomphone, his 13th. His last 4 victims died within the 3 weeks before his arrest.

Although one can know little of the details of Dahmer’s fantasy life, there are hints that diabolical themes were by no means rare. Dahmer was known to be fascinated by movies like Friday the 13th (Cunningham, 1980) and A Nightmare on Elm Street (Shaye & Craven, 1984) and to prefer heavy metal rock bands like Iron Maiden and Black Sabbath. He repeatedly watched the Return of the Jedi (Kazanjian & Marquand, 1983) in which he identified with an evil emperor who wields absolute control over his subjects, even to the extent of purchasing yellow contact lenses to better conform to the emperor’s likeness, and the Exorcist movies (e.g., Exorcist III, DeHaven & Blatty, 1990) in which he identified with Satan. The themes of invading and controlling another, as in
Satanic possession, and in his desire to populate his life outside fantasy with zombies, corpses who return to animation through obedience to commands by a powerful controller, were important to Dahmer. They are matters to which I return.

Although the machinery of prosecution and the media understandably focused on the morbid following Dahmer’s arrest, it is not unthinkable that loving impulses survived in him. If his preoccupations with dead animals were morbid, his relations with living ones were not. The record suggests warmth and joy with his kitten, Buffy, his dog, Frisky, and a baby night hawk, Dusty, that Jeffrey spied to save in Ames. Moreover, his report of having felt sickened when as a passenger in his marijuana supplier’s car, the driver deliberately sped up and hit a beagle puppy that had wandered onto the road, suggests a horror of cruelty. His relationship with his grandmother was described as unusually warm and loving on both sides. One may therefore wonder if, at times of his greatest loneliness, Dahmer’s fantasy might have taken a poignant turn, perhaps to imagine all those who, in the warmth of family or company or in the light and laughing companionship of a lover, consumed the delicious chocolates that were, in part, the fruit of his own lonely labor.

The numerous descriptions of Dahmer in the media all employed language suggestive of drained vitality and deanimation. Dahmer is “withdrawn,” he is “mild-mannered,” he is “unassuming,” he is “secretive,” he is “soft-spoken.” The descriptors evoke a spirit less evil than depleted, a hollow man. Look at how others described him:

**Newsweek:** “The eyes of Jeffrey Dahmer—placid, almost vacant—project no sinister gleam” (Mathews & Springen, 1992, p. 45).

**Shari Dahmer, stepmother:** “He couldn’t embrace. He couldn’t touch. His eyes were dead. This child has no heart left within him. He was a walking zombie” (Dvorchak & Holewa, 1991, p. 32).

**Deputy Chief of Police of West Allis:** “He talks about killing people just as if it’s like pouring a glass of water. He shows no emotion whatsoever” (Mathews & Springen, 1992, p. 45).

**Probation Officer:** “Dahmer’s voice is almost devoid of expression or inflection” (Mathews & Springen, 1992, p. 46).

**Father:** “His face was a wall. His eyes were blank, utterly void, beyond the call of the most basic forms of sympathy and understanding, beyond even the capacity to ape such emotions” (Dahmer, 1994, pp. 99–100, 184).

These are descriptions of a man, anhedonic and depressed. If one examines the profiles of the Wiggins (1966) Content scales and the Tryon, Stein, and Chu Cluster scales (Stein, 1968), both have confirmed that Dahmer had responded to the major content domains of the item pool in a highly selective manner (see Figure 2). For both scale sets, scores based on depressive item content are at least 20 T scores higher than the remaining content areas. Items Dahmer endorsed carrying this flavor include not being happy most of the time (107F/95F), having a dearth of things in life that keep him interested (8F/9F), feeling that life is not worthwhile and that the future is hopeless (88F/75F, 516/449), and having a sense of impending dread and feeling condemned (543/463, 202/234).

Several additional items, some quite obvious, some subtle, highlight his eroded attachment to life (Sc1B [Emotional Alienation]; T = 92). These expressed feeling blue and feeling that life is a strain (76/65, 301/273) and indeed wishing he were dead (339/303) much of the time; getting no pleasure from play or recreation (207F/188F); and indifference to money, business (322/290), and what may happen to him (104/92). These sentiments, reflecting a lack of care in matters affecting him, are confirmed in the content of a few subtle items as well. Thus, he felt able to tell others about himself (384F/391F), denied touchiness on some subjects to the extent that he could not talk about them (303F/274F), and claimed to be free of worry over his manner of dress (556F/NA).
When viewed within the context of others’ observations of him, his eyes, his voice, his face, and his flat-line emotional-ity, Dahmer’s responses to these items bespeak less dysphoria than a kind of entropic dullness and devitalization: a necrophile whose stimulus value was itself necrophilous. He met others not as a sadistic monster but in the way of the bore who strangles the vitality out of his topic and deadens his audience. Having abandoned the vitality of relationships among the living, he sought their simulacra among the dead. For Dahmer’s relationships, life began postmortem.

The role of sex in Dahmer’s life is less than clear. Lust and control were the key words in his vocabulary. He reportedly masturbated on a daily basis from mid-adolescence and while in the service and did so frequently thereafter as well, invariably to gay stimuli, photographs, gay porno movies, the memories of his past partners, and to their skulls. He spent thousands of dollars on pornographic magazines and videotapes. That his lust may have a strong inherited source is suggested by his father’s sex drive—Joyce confided to a neighbor that her husband was “insatiable” (Masters, 1993, p. 56)—sufficient to have prompted a desire for daily intercourse into his 50s. Dahmer has described himself in some circumstances as being driven by “ungovernable lust,” at times as “driven mad by lust”:

My consuming lust [was] to experience their bodies. The desire never left. There were times I couldn’t fulfill it because of time and work reasons. The focus of my life was to find fulfillment and satisfaction with good-looking guys. The cannibalism and saving of body parts were just offshoots. Killing was the ultimate selfishness. The fact that it was against the law was the ultimate drawback. I was trying to think of a way not to have to kill them. I wanted to find a way to create a person who would be open to my suggestion so I wouldn’t have to go out looking for partners. (Stingl, 1992d, p. 10)

There is little doubt that his sexual activity grew increasingly compulsive over time, particularly over the 10-month period between September 1990 and his arrest when 10 of his victims met their fate. In the latter part of this period, the killings became frenzied, with the last 4 victims dying within a period of 19 days. It was during this same 10-month period that Dahmer came to feel that he would never get caught. There were some lucky circumstances, however. The corpse of Tony Hughes, killed 3 days earlier, lay on Dahmer’s bedroom floor when the police returned Konerak Sinthasomphone to Apartment 213.

In few syndromes does an association between sex and aggression seem more natural than in necrophilia. As for so many others, sex for Dahmer may have been the anodyne for his poverty of relationship. Or, as a man said to me once, “I’m a sex addict but a relationship anorexic (sic).” For the catastrophically alienated, sex fails to deliver on its promise of togetherness. Rather, it magnifies loneliness and renders more acute the pain of being unable to reach out beyond the self. It is, in fact, a recaptulation of the original trauma in which early deprivation stood for emotional rejection, the pain of which brought about the shutdown of access to one’s feelings by another. Dahmer denied ever having been in love with anyone (324/291), and admitted having been disappointed in love (239/219), to have worried about and wished he were not bothered by thoughts about sex (179/166, 297/268), and denied that his sex life was satisfactory (20F/12F).

In any case, items such as these reveal that, for Dahmer, sex fell outside the realm of personal amorousness. Rather than a means of escape from alienation and conflict, it was itself alienated and conflicted, and the way out of this conflict, its solution, the path Dahmer found to passionate attachment, was death. In the transformation of his guests to corpses, his potency was restored. No longer the child whose viscera was at the mercy of others, he could handle the viscera of his victims, feel the excitement of their escaping heat, find the penis he once feared lost in congress with their entrails.

His level of estrangement and fears of others would seem to dispose him to need a great deal of control in any close interactions with others. Sexual situations, in particular, might be fraught with extraordinary risks for one so divorced from his fellows.

I tried to check this out in two ways. First, and simplest, I simply gathered all the MMPI items in which the word control appears. There are five such items, and for each, Dahmer asserted self-control and denied controlling influences outside his own ego: He denied fits of laughing and crying that he could not control (22F/23F), that his conduct was largely controlled by the customs of those around him (141F/129F), that he had had attacks in which he could not control his movements or speech even though he knew what was going on around him (194F/182F), that someone had control over his mind (275/336), or that he had one or more faults that were so big that it seemed better to accept them and try to control them rather than try to get rid of them (484/NA).

Yet, however remarkable in their unanimity, these items do not make a strong case for Dahmer’s need to dominate interpersonal situations. There are many other items that do speak to Dahmer’s extraordinary needs for control in person-to-person encounters, and I subcategorize these as follows: For the willingness to assert influence, Dahmer endorsed frequently finding it necessary to stand up for what he thought was right (112/120), to have set someone right when they said silly or ignorant things about which he had knowledge (380/NA), to have corrected people who expressed an ignorant belief (444F/NA), to have let people know where he stood on things (502/365), and to have strongly defended his own opinions as a rule (520/452). For the willingness to resist influence by others, he asserted that he kept on at a thing until others lost their patience with him (64/55) and having done the opposite of what some bossy people requested even though he knew they were right (109/98) but denied having been easily downed in an argument (82F/709F), having had his conduct largely controlled by the customs of those around.
him (141F/129F), having passed up something he wanted to do because others felt that he was going about it in the wrong way or that it was not worth doing (443F/421F, 564F/369F), and that people could pretty easily change him even when his mind was made up (531F/457F). Also, to at least some extent, these attitudes appear to be grounded in two other sets of attitudes: first, intellectual confidence such that he felt about as capable and smart as most others around him (122/109), that his judgment was better than it ever was (46/43), and denied having several times given up doing something because he thought too little of his ability (357F/326F) unless the risk of failure was high (307/279); second, freedom from sensitivity or perhaps a degree of callousness such that his feelings were not easily hurt (79/63), even by criticism or scolding (138F/127F).

Even in the period before Dahmer’s second homicide, the importance he attached to total control, to finding someone who would not leave him, is hinted at in his theft of a male department store mannequin for sexual purposes, his perusal of obituaries to ascertain the whereabouts of a deceased young man to steal him from a funeral home or grave, an unsuccessful attempt to exhume a corpse from a cemetery, and his consultation with taxidermists for tips on the preservation of corpses. His need for control in close human contacts is confirmed in reports that he was known for drugging those he met at the Tubs, Club Bath, and Club Milwaukee, local gay bathhouses, and simply watching them, sometimes for hours. Eventually, there were enough complaints—one of his partners required hospitalization following an overdose—that he was ejected from one of them, Club Bath, and told not to return. One of his bathhouse subjects seemed to confirm what others have suggested, that these incidents were, in part, experiments Dahmer executed to observe the operation of sedatives to establish reliable knockout doses: “His interest in me didn’t seem to be sexual. It seemed to be to get me to drink. Maybe he was experimenting with me to see what it would take to put someone out” (Jaeger & Balousek, 1991, p. 126).

These episodes point to the possibility that Dahmer’s need for control was driven by his aversion to being deserted. The circumstances of his first murder and the reports of those surviving Dahmer’s hospitality emphasize that the killing of his guests was only the ultimate expression of this aversion, and that those he slew were those he wished to keep. This desire “to have and to hold” was so strong as to motivate his return to his former home in Bath Township, more than a decade after the murder of Steven Hicks, to retrieve samples of the corpse delicti to bring back to Milwaukee.

Although he felt a sense of power that his secret world with its killing was totally unknown to his family and neighbors, Dahmer did not relish killing. He could go through with it only after numbing himself with alcohol. By 1991, he had begun experiments in chemical lobotomy to try to keep his victims alive while they remained under his control. “I didn’t want to keep killing people and have nothing left except the skull“ (Masters, 1993, p. 176). His method involved drilling holes in at least four of his victims heads through which he injected acid or boiling water. Of one of his victims, Jeremiah Weinberger, Dahmer reported, he “was up and about for one day after the injection. I had to work so I gave him a second dose … and left for work” (Stingl, 1992d, p. 10). Weinberger was still alive when Dahmer returned, but died the next day.

According his defense attorney Gerald Boyle, Dahmer wanted his victims: “Jeffrey Dahmer did not want to stop. He wanted to create zombies—people who were there for him” (Mathews, 1992, p. 31). Dahmer told police that he ate only those young men he liked: He wanted them to become part of him. Says Boyle, “He ate body parts … so that [his victims] would become alive again in him” (Stingl, 1992b, pp. 1, 8).

With the death of his victims, control could pass into ownership. There was no longer the threat of their leaving, rejecting, abandoning. Nor was there the possibility of resistance to Dahmer’s gaze, his hands, his camera, his knife. Now he could be painstaking in posing and photographing his victims, the better to enhance his fantasy and feelings of closeness. Inside and outside were now equally available; parts of his victims could be selected from the whole. He could possess. Prior to dismemberment, Dahmer might hug and caress the corpse, masturbate on it, pose it, shower it, cut it open, examine the colors, have sex with the viscera. He could examine it inside and out, leisurely, in detail. Following dismemberment, he could decide which parts to keep and which to discard, arrange parts to be photographed; he could separate flesh from bone; he could paint skulls and penises, and he could prepare parts to be eaten or to be stored for later consumption. In death, they became permanent “company” in his apartment. He wished to have company at work as well, and so kept the head of his fifth victim, Anthony Sears, along with other body parts, in his locker at the chocolate company.

Dahmer had a mixed response to items dealing with anger and hostility. On the one hand, he admitted to having felt like swearing (30/29) and smashing things (39/37), to having been made angry when people hurdy him (536/461), to having been often sorry because he was so cross and grouchy (468/430), and to having been often so annoyed when someone tried to get ahead of him in a line of people that he would speak to him about it (417/410). On the other hand, he denied that he was often said to be hotheaded (381F/389F), that he easily became impatient with people (336F/302F), that he could become permanent “company” in his apartment. He wished to have company at work as well, and so kept the head of his fifth victim, Anthony Sears, along with other body parts, in his locker at the chocolate company.

Although he felt a sense of power that his secret world with its killing was totally unknown to his family and neighbors, Dahmer did not relish killing. He could go through with it only after numbing himself with alcohol. By 1991, he had begun experiments in chemical lobotomy to try to keep his victims alive while they remained under his control. “I didn’t want to keep killing people and have nothing left except the skull“ (Masters, 1993, p. 176). His method involved drilling holes in at least four of his victims heads through which he injected acid or boiling water. Of one of his victims, Jeremiah Weinberger, Dahmer reported, he “was up and about for one day after the injection. I had to work so I gave him a second dose … and left for work” (Stingl, 1992d, p. 10). Weinberger was still alive when Dahmer returned, but died the next day.

According his defense attorney Gerald Boyle, Dahmer wanted his victims: “Jeffrey Dahmer did not want to stop. He wanted to create zombies—people who were there for him” (Mathews, 1992, p. 31). Dahmer told police that he ate only these young men he liked: He wanted them to become part of him. Says Boyle, “He ate body parts … so that [his victims] would become alive again in him” (Stingl, 1992b, pp. 1, 8).

With the death of his victims, control could pass into ownership. There was no longer the threat of their leaving, rejecting, abandoning. Nor was there the possibility of resistance to Dahmer’s gaze, his hands, his camera, his knife. Now he could be painstaking in posing and photographing his victims, the better to enhance his fantasy and feelings of closeness. Inside and outside were now equally available; parts of his victims could be selected from the whole. He could possess. Prior to dismemberment, Dahmer might hug and caress the corpse, masturbate on it, pose it, shower it, cut it open, examine the colors, have sex with the viscera. He could examine it inside and out, leisurely, in detail. Following dismemberment, he could decide which parts to keep and which to discard, arrange parts to be photographed; he could separate flesh from bone; he could paint skulls and penises, and he could prepare parts to be eaten or to be stored for later consumption. In death, they became permanent “company” in his apartment. He wished to have company at work as well, and so kept the head of his fifth victim, Anthony Sears, along with other body parts, in his locker at the chocolate company.

Dahmer had a mixed response to items dealing with anger and hostility. On the one hand, he admitted to having felt like swearing (30/29) and smashing things (39/37), to having been made angry when people hurdy him (536/461), to having been often sorry because he was so cross and grouchy (468/430), and to having been often so annoyed when someone tried to get ahead of him in a line of people that he would speak to him about it (417/410). On the other hand, he denied that he was often said to be hotheaded (381F/389F), that he easily became impatient with people (336F/302F), that he could not understand why he had been so cross and grouchy (129/116), that he had at times had to be rough with people (468/430), and to having been often so annoyed when someone tried to get ahead of him in a line of people that he would speak to him about it (417/410). On the other hand, he denied that he was often said to be hotheaded (381F/389F), that he easily became impatient with people (336F/302F), that he could not understand why he had been so cross and grouchy (129/116), that he had at times had to be rough with people (468/430), and to having been often so annoyed when someone tried to get ahead of him in a line of people that he would speak to him about it (417/410).
and ultimately deserted—sought to reduce his vulnerability dered in his home and with an intent to cancel his fear of the repeatedly reenacted the traumatic situation of his desertion. Indeed, it appears that Dahmer of Jeffrey’s desertion by his father and then by his mother first murder become clearer. One may suppose that Steven psychological distance necessary to assess threatening situa- tions and formulate measured responses to them.

Tracing the origins of the paranoid elements in the profile is complicated by the legal situation obtaining at the time the test was taken (January 4, 1992). Items that expressed a belief in being plotted against (121/138), that others were saying insulting and vulgar things about him (364/333), and denying having no enemies who really wished to harm him (347F/314F) might simply reflect the Dahmer’s assessment of the motives and activity of the prosecutor and his team. However, there are grounds for supposing such attitudes may reflect less the situational aspects of the case than a more chronic disability in forming valid judgments regarding the dispositions of others toward him.

In the normal case, such judgments are made in part with reference to complex resonances created by others on the tymanum of people’s own empathy. If the capacity for em- pathy fails to develop or is damaged, this source of informa- tion may be unavailable, forcing a reliance on other sources such as fantasy and observation. Observation, however, may be severely degraded when uninformed by empathy. Recall the devastating effects of emotional and social deprivation reported by Harlow and Harlow (1971) and, in particular, Milsky’s (1968) report that deprived monkeys could not discrim- inate facial expressions. That the consequences of the loss of empathy may be catastrophic is suggested by the consis- tency of the finding of damaged empathy in the transmis- sion of abuse literature (van der Kolk, 1987, p. 133). When a sense of threat or menace supervenes, it will synergize with and be amplified by any diminished feeling of control and/or by chronic pervasive mistrust of others. Another of the con- sequences of trauma is an impaired physiological response to stress (van der Kolk, 1987, p. 66). The diminished capacity to activate autonomic stress reactions in a measured and appro- priate fashion may result in exaggerated arousal in the face of relatively minor environmental challenges, perhaps to the point of an emergency response. In fact, in the context of traumatically disrupted stress mechanisms, autonomic arousal may itself interfere with the ability to achieve the psychological distance necessary to assess threatening situa- tions and formulate measured responses to them.

It is in this connection that the circumstances of Dahmer’s first murder become clearer. One may suppose that Steven Hicks’s announced desire to leave threatened a recapitulation of Jeffrey’s desertion by his father and then by his mother and brother only days earlier. Indeed, it appears that Dahmer repeatedly reenacted the traumatic situation of his desertion. With one exception, the second, victims were always murdered in his home and with an intent to cancel his fear of the threat that a point of their impending departure would come.

One might speculate that Dahmer—deprived, neglected, and ultimately deserted—sought to reduce his vulnerability by splitting his parents into good and bad parts. The good parts are incorporated as succoring images, the caretakers within Dahmer’s fantasy. Dahmer’s self becomes fused with the bad parts, in this way becoming blameworthy for the abuse he suffered and enabling a shift in orientation from the one threatened with emotional starvation to one identified with the power to destroy.

In this connection, one can look at a large set of items, Dahmer’s responses to which may be surprising. Descriptively, these items are easy to characterize. Of the 15, 14 neg- atively overlap the MMPI–2 Cynicism Content scale; almost half positively overlap Gough’s (1957) Tolerance scale. Dahmer’s responses to these items denied that he had gotten a raw deal from life (16F/17F); that he had encountered or had to subordinate himself to people with less knowledge or expertise than his own (59F/50F, 406F/346F) or found people jealous of his good ideas just because they had not thought of them first (469F/358F); that his intentions or way of doing things had been misunderstood by others, even when he had tried to correct them and be helpful (244F/225F, 404F/403F); that people lied to avoid trouble or to seek ad- vantage (93F/81F, 117F/104F, 316F/284F) or that they acted from opportunistic motives (71F/58F, 280F/254F); that peo- ple generally inwardly disliked putting themselves out to help others and demanded more respect for their own rights than they were willing to grant others (319F/286F, 436F/352F); that the person who has left valuable property unprotected shared little culpability for its theft with the thief (313F/283F); or that the future was too uncertain for a person to make serious plans (395F/399F). The content of these items is relatively homogeneous and superficially impunitive, but the form is revealing. More than half specify “most people,” “people generally,” “a great many people,” “nearly everyone,” or “I have often met/found people” the language of generalization.

Unlike his responses to some of the more patently para- noid items (plotted against, etc.), his responses to these items suggest a beneficent constraint; its perspective, olympian; and like his carefully parsed responses to items with angry connotations, as in the preceding, these item responses provide a counterweight to admissions elsewhere in the protocol of having been plotted against, of enemies who had wished him harm, of guardedness toward people who were more friendly than he expected, of his belief that it was safer to trust nobody.

By contrast, in these items, normal skepticism regarding the motives of others is denied. Dahmer refused to recognize, or at least acknowledge, the threat of being suckered, lied to, exploited, cheated, ripped off, or misunderstood. Instead he seized the moral high ground from which one may oversee moral infractions and contemplate their sanctions.

Is this moral superiority benign or evil? Is it trusting, altru- istic, expressive of a belief in the core goodness of mankind? What manner of wrath could such beneficence conceal? Is it cold, punitive, potentially sadistic? Is it consistent with an
identification with the aggressor? The “most people” and “nearly everyone” create a contrast between the many and the few. It is the many who forswear lying, swindling, cheating, and double dealing. These jobs, then, must go to the few, and a community of righteousness will find them out, punish them, expel them.

Green (1983) noted that “identification with the aggressor is embedded in the compulsion to repeat the trauma” (p. 234), and as I have shown, Dahmer was nothing if not a repeater of trauma. As a child, he was powerless to command attention and care; at school he could command attention, but not friends, by clowning. Finally, he could not be prevented from being separated from his father and deserted by his mother and brother, twice. As an adult, he learned that he could populate his household by arranging for his guests to remain with him. Of the 17 killings, 16 conform to this pattern.

There is another aspect to these items. They are the things nice people say. Nice people do not say that other people are liars, cheats, thieves, opportunists, psychoxenopaths, phonies, manipulators, and the like. They are neither suspicious, selfish, resentful, nor cynical because others generally find such people unattractive. Dahmer’s exaggerated denial of cynicism in these items may have been less a reflection of his true beliefs than an attempt to attire himself in a way that is attractive to those he wishes to attract. Such vestments are, of course, perfectly consistent with intimacy openers such as “Hi, I’m Jeff. I like the way you dance,” or “You’re the nicest guy I’ve met in Milwaukee.” It would be easy enough to pass off these denials of cynicism as cynicism at its most crafty. However, one could as easily argue that these expressions of trust and belief in others are a tactic in a kind of self-directed, fixed role therapy (Kelly, 1955), steps that eventually lead to the experience of trust and ultimately to the door of a relationship. The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. There is nothing cynical about reducing one’s vulnerability by seeking to position oneself advantageously for new forays into trust when one’s past has shown a reliance on others to be foolhardy and dangerous.

Did Dahmer blame others for his predicament? Again, he denied getting a raw deal from life (16F/17F). Indeed, he asserted getting all the sympathy he should (306/278), denied he had been punished without cause (157F/145F) and that his success had been limited by people who had it in for him (35F/42F). Nor did he attribute his acts to alien forces such as being possessed by evil spirits (27/24). Nor did he fault those responsible for his arrest and prosecution (113/126, 376/NA). Rather, he viewed his acts as proceeding from overwhelming lust:

I often fantasized that I was always able to get what I wanted—power, sex and money. I always wished to have control over events. I made my fantasies more powerful than my real life. I got a kick out of it, but I wasn’t really completely satisfied. It was giving me some pleasure, I think it was like a compulsion. (Stingl, 1992c, p. 6)

On the MMPI, he acknowledged having had one or more bad habits that were so strong that it was no use fighting against them (459/NA) and one or more faults that were so big that it seemed better to accept them and try to control them rather than to try to get rid of them (484/NA).

How about his family? Even here, Dahmer declined to spread any responsibility for his situation. Only three of the items dealing with family relations suggest complaint, and one of these is ludicrous. His admissions were that he had at times very much wanted to leave home (21/21), that the members of his family and his close relatives got along well (527F/455F), and that his family did not like the work he had chosen (42/54).

The remaining 20 items describe a family atmosphere that is, if anything, more harmonious than the norm. Thus, Dahmer asserted love for both his mother and father (220/276, 65/90) and his judgment that both were good people (177/182, 17/6). He described his home as generally warm and harmonious, and asserted that he had very few quarrels with members of his family (96/83), that his home life was as pleasant as that of most people (137/125), that his relatives were nearly all in sympathy with him (237/217), and denied that there was little love and companionship in his family as compared with most homes (216F/195F), or that he sometimes felt hate toward members of his family who he usually loved (282F/256F).

He described his parents as reasonable and fair, asserted unusual independence from family rule (235/214), and denied that they often objected to the kind of people he went around with (224F/202F), that they found more fault with him than was appropriate or often punished him without cause (245F/288F, 157F/145F), or that they treated him more like a child than a grown-up (212F/190F). Symptoms and quirks among family members were likewise denied: Thus, he denied that some had had habits that bothered and annoyed him very much (226F/205F), that some had done things that had frightened him (315F/17F), that one or more was very nervous (421F/413F), and that some had quick tempers (516F/449F).

Even an item about having reason for feeling jealous of one or more members of his family (247F/300F), an item seemingly certain to evoke the memory of the devoted attention paid to his younger brother, David, the one who accompanied his mother as she left Bath Township, was endorsed in the negative.

It is difficult to know exactly what to make of these responses. As noted earlier, they may simply reflect the kind of apparent purification that is sometimes achievable with splitting operations. Perhaps they signify a kind of “Stockholm” (Strentz, 1980) affection that Dahmer retained for his family, embraced for being the only game in town. Perhaps these marks on an answer sheet line up with the family that made its home in Dahmer’s fantasy. It is even conceivable that these gestures connote the presence of an occult residue of tenderness from which can issue forgiveness and a bid for
reconciliation. Asked what he would change in his childhood, Dahmer said, “I would change that my parents didn’t get along” (Masters, 1991, p. 265). To my own ear, there is sweet pity in these words.

Also, one may see irony in the fact that postarrest argument between Dahmer’s parents focused on whom to blame for causing their son to become a serial murderer. His father fixed on his wife’s mental and emotional maladjustment. His mother blamed her distant husband, the absent father who was dissatisfied with his son’s achievement.

For his part, Jeffrey Dahmer blamed himself. His responses suggest that he accepted personally the harm he had done others and that he experienced regret and remorse for his acts. Thus, he stated that he received all the sympathy he deserved (306/278), that he had not lived the right kind of life (61/52), that he was no good at all (418/411), deserved severe punishment for his sins (413/407), and was condemned (202/234). The form of self-blame and remorse explicit in these items may or may not correspond to the feelings experienced by persons less alienated and of better integrated conscience. In his own words

I knew I was sick or evil or both. No matter what I did, I could not undo the terrible harm I have caused. My attempt to identify the remains was the best that I could do, and that was hardly anything. Thank God there will be no more harm that I can do. I take all the blame for what I did. I hurt many people … families … the judge in my earlier case … those policemen … my probation officer … my mother and father and stepmother. I don’t ever want freedom. Frankly, I wanted death for myself. These were not hate crimes. I did what I did not for reasons of hate. I hated no one. (Schwartz, 1992, pp. 216–218)

However, matters of hate, control, and lust, along with the traumatic and general environmental pollens that germinated them and gave them form, are only that part of the Jeffrey Dahmer story to which the MMPI speaks most clearly. On matters of nature, of heredity, the MMPI is all but silent. There is nothing in publicly available sources of information from which to construct a genetic family history. However, a memoir written by Dahmer’s father, A Father’s Story (1994), provides some strong leads.

In many ways, Lionel Dahmer’s personality and temperament appear to be attenuated versions of his son’s. Both shared an alexithymia-like constriction of emotional life and defective empathy. Whereas Jeffrey was described as passive, monotone, emotionless, and destitute of feeling, his father described his own emotional life as “a broad, flat plain” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 35). “I have always found it difficult to read the exact emotional state of another person” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 36); “I was … strangely disassociated … limited in my ability to respond with feeling to another’s feeling” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 205). If Jeffrey was severely introverted, fearful, inadequate, and alienated from his fellows, at various points his father described himself as “horribly shy,” “awkward,” “insecure,” fearful and avoidant of change,” “plagued by a grave sense of my own inadequacy,” conceiving of the world “as something hostile and suspicious,” unable to “figure out the social connections that others seemed to understand immediately,” finding “the subtleties of social life” beyond his grasp (Dahmer, 1994, p. 64). “I simply didn’t know how things worked with other people … I couldn’t find a way to make other people seem less strange and unknowable” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 65). Reflecting on his son’s fear of school, his awkwardness and lack of friends, “it struck me that he had probably inherited this same dread [from me] (Dahmer, 1994, pp. 65) and noted “the general passivity with which I … react … to the ups and downs of life” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 36).

So great was his father’s obliviousness to his son’s proclivities that he failed to tumble to Jeffrey’s alcoholism until after his graduation from high school, at least 4 years after Jeffrey’s more or less daily alcohol consumption, nor to his homosexuality until 1988, 3 years before his arrest for murder, despite his having had but a single date with a woman (high school prom), and “during all the years of his young adulthood [he] had never expressed the slightest interest in a woman” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 187).

Nor was the father free of morbid trends and preoccupations of his own, at least in his youth. For example, he admitted to an early obsession with fire and to stealing matches (Dahmer, 1994, p. 49); later, “[this obsession] grew larger, and began to include a fascination with bombs, with the making of explosives” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 51). At one point, he used a makeshift hand grenade “to blow a boy off a bike” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 226). He wrote

I … saw myself as weak and inept. As a result … I began to develop a feeling of nearly complete powerlessness and dependency. In order to act against my own corrosive and infuriating sense of weakness and inferiority, I began to gravitate toward violence.” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 225)

As with lust, the son’s preoccupation with control was forecast in his father’s psychological make up (Dahmer, 1994, 218–221, et passim). Dahmer pere remarked on the sense of control and respect his peers’ knowledge of his bomb-making prowess gave him: “The bomb made me formidable, and in doing so, it also made me ‘visible.’ With the bomb I was no longer a faceless nonentity” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 227). If Jeffrey repeatedly dreamed or fantasized of murder, “So had I, usually after attacks by bullies” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 212). In another example of a violent leaning, Lionel mentions wiring a couch in the family living room, enabling him to deliver a “harsh electrical shock to anyone who sat down on it” (Dahmer, 1994, p. 228).

Father and son even shared a concern with control in the context of sex. Lionel recalls that at 12 or 13, he invited a girl from across the street up to his room and hypnotized her “so that I could control her entirely,” in part “in order to ‘have my way with her’” (Dahmer, 1994, pp. 222–223).
Although the habits of substance use of Dahmer’s father’s parents and ancestors are unknown, according to his former wife, Lionel neither drank nor smoked. Jeffrey did both abusively and for at least one period in his life, also abused marijuana. Dahmer’s maternal grandfather was an alcoholic, and certainly in the course of her marriage, his mother abused various pharmaceutical substances, especially sedatives including opiates.

Of course, none of these points of similarity establish a heritable foundation for Dahmer’s personality and psychopathology, although they are suggestive in this regard. There are alternative explanations for observations of this kind, notably modeling. However, given that these parent–offspring relationships are known, the observations I give here appear consistent with genetic transmission.

Reduced to its essentials, the Jeffrey Dahmer story is one of a child to whom intimations of unwantedness arrived early in life. Neglect, deprivation, and parental strife supported an early escape into fantasy and an interruption in those normal developmental sequences that lead to the possibility of relationships. The flowering of adolescence brought with it the ridicule and ostracism by his peers, the sting of which he could relieve only by blunting their contempt by assuming the role of a clown, a fool, and with the numbness afforded by alcohol. At age 18, the earlier signs of omission by which Dahmer had gauged his value to those responsible for his care were powerfully reinforced by a positive sign: his desertion by his father, mother, and brother. Prevention of desertion and the regaining of human association became Dahmer’s primary life goals. Although there surely came a point when Dahmer knew that those he chose to share his hospitality would not leave his company alive, the circumstances do not support murder, per se, as a significant aim. In a manner that is both perverse and horrible, his killings were an expression of his desire for closeness, a desire that superseded lust and control.

In terms of a trauma model (e.g., Edelstien, 1990), the facts can be organized as follows: (a) the nature of the trauma, the cumulative trauma of deprivation and neglect supplemented by more acute traumas of invasion and desertion; (b) the painful feelings aroused in the trauma, feelings of powerlessness and of not being important enough to be cared for, protected, disciplined, included, taken seriously and, at age 18, chosen; and (c) the symptoms designed to protect the patient from reexperiencing those feelings—these include Dahmer’s exaggerated demands for control of intimate interactions that necessitated rendering his intimates intoxicated, unconscious, or dead before he could feel secure in their presence. Dahmer’s necrophilia and cannibalism are the ultimate expression of his need to be in absolute control by having his intimates rendered utterly passive.

I am at the end of this tale. I have tried to convince you that the tale of Jeffrey Dahmer is one told twice, once through the media, third-party sources, and some additional information provided by Dr. Friedman, and once by Dahmer himself as he picked his way through the MMPI item pool.

Many questions remain. The Dahmer story I presented here, if coherent, is far from complete. The story barely hints at the nature of his suffering, his fantasy, his isolation. We know little about how a nascent interest in animal anatomy and chemistry evolved in the direction it did. Nor do we know how he acquired the emotional wherewithal to overcome the inhibitions to the commission of lethal violence on another human being or, in their absence, the process by which such inhibitions failed to form. That Dahmer was exposed to emotional neglect and deprivation from an early age is clear as is his exposure to the stresses of his parents’ marital conflicts, his medical traumas, and his later rejection by peers. However, the record is devoid of references to willful physical or sexual abuse by parents, peers, or others. Even the neglect and deprivation appear to be less the result of wanton abandonment or callous disregard for his welfare than to unfortunate priorities, commitments, and disabilities on the part of those responsible for guiding his development. His father gave him a chemistry set at age 10; sought to interest him in chemistry, Boy Scouts, soccer, tennis, archery, and bodybuilding; showed persistent interest in his academic progress; and sent him audiotapes and videotapes about Christ when Jeffrey was out and on his own. His grandmother took him in and tried to help him to embrace a better life; she left him in no doubt that she loved him. Although less is known about his mother, she kept a detailed and loving diary of his early years and also, no doubt, found moments to offer him kindness, gentleness, and support. So far as they involve his parents, his recollections, if his self-report is to be believed, are positive at the bottom line. In more objective terms, Dahmer’s history is not unlike those of many who, albeit with struggle and reverses, become productive workers, helpful neighbors, loving partners, and law-abiding citizens. His history thus fails to explain how he first came to kill or how he did so again and again thereafter. His responses to the MMPI are orienting to some important areas of thought, feeling, and attitude in his personality, but these also fail to give a satisfactory account of the origins of his crimes. Nevertheless, his test responses do illuminate important facets of his life history and his adjustments to the events and circumstances that befell him, and they do so in a way that suggests an increment of understanding beyond that available in a traditional code type or scale-by-scale analysis of MMPI scores.

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 REFERENCES


8/22/59 Lionel Herbert Dahmer and Annette Joyce “Rocky” Flint married in Milwaukee. Initially take an apartment near Marquette University; in March, 1960, move into downstairs flat of Lionel’s parents’, 2357 South 57th Street, West Allis, WI.

5/21/60 Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer (JD) born at Evangelical Deaconess Hospital in Milwaukee.

9/60 Family moves to a one-bedroom apartment on Van Buren Street in Milwaukee after relations between Joyce and her mother-in-law become tense.

11/25/61 JD takes his first steps alone.

1962 Lionel Dahmer graduates from Marquette University with MSc degree in Analytical Chemistry.

1962, Fall Dahmer family moves to Ames, IA, for Lionel to pursue the doctorate in Chemistry at Iowa State University. They live in a small home in Pammel Court owned by the university.

3/19/64 Dahmer enters the hospital for repair of a double hemia. Complains to mother of severe pain in his abdomen and groin. Expresses fear that his penis has been removed.

10/66 Lionel completes the PhD.

11/19/66 Family moves to Doylestown, OH, near Akron, after Lionel finds job as a research chemist with Pittsburgh Plate Glass company (later PPG Industries) in Barberton; Jeffrey attends first grade at Hazel Harvey Elementary School.

12/18/66 Birth of JD’s brother, David Lionel Dahmer.


5/17/68 Family moves, the fifth move since JD’s birth, to a three bedroom ranch-style home on 1.7 wooded acres at 4480 West Bath Rd., Bath Township, OH, 10 miles north of Akron on Interstate 77. In probation report dated 4/27/90, problems with sexuality issues mentioned and linked to Lionel’s report that JD was molested by a neighborhood boy at age 8. Having been recently uprooted, JD may have been vulnerable to molestation. He denies such an incident.

7/70 Joyce Dahmer is admitted to Akron General Hospital for severe anxiety. She leaves after 3 days but is readmitted a few months later for 1 month.

1970 to

1971 Begins to experiment with animals.

1971, Fall Begins Eastview Junior High School.

1974, Fall Begins Revere High School.

1975 Dead dog found in woods impaled on a stick behind Dahmer home.

11/4/77 Lionel Dahmer files for divorce; Joyce responds. Both charge extreme cruelty and gross neglect.

1978, Early Custody battle for David Dahmer, age 11, begins.

4/78 Lionel Dahmer meets Shari Shinn Jordan.

6/4/78 JD graduates from Revere High School with about a 2.0 GPA; *Minutemen* yearbook inscription reads “Jeff Dahmer: Band 1; Lantern 3; Tennis intramurals 2, 3, 4; Ohio State Univ. (Business)”.

6/18/78 JD murders Steven Hicks, age 19, at Bath Township home while Joyce and David are away visiting relatives in Chippewa Falls, WI. (Norris [1992] gave this date as 6/25/78.)

6/25/78 Stopped by police for driving erratically and cited. Assessed for intoxication. Police did not open trash bags on the back seat of Dahmer’s vehicle containing the remains of Steven Hicks. Later fined $20 for erratic driving.

7/24/78 Divorce decree granted to Lionel and Joyce Dahmer; Joyce is awarded custody of David, $400/month in alimony, and $225/month in child support.

8/24/78 Joyce and David move to Chippewa Falls, WI, to live with relatives, leaving JD alone in the house for the second time.

8/26/78 Lionel Dahmer comes to the West Bath Road house for a scheduled visitation with David but finds JD alone, with no money, little food, and a broken refrigerator. Lionel and Shari move into the house and live with JD until he moves to Columbus, OH, to enter Ohio State University (OSU).

9/78 Dahmer enters OSU, living in Room 541 of the Ross House dorm with three roommates. Begins selling his plasma for alcohol money.

12/78 JD drops out of OSU after a single quarter; much heavy drinking, drinking in class, passing out in the street, etc. Suspected in the theft of $120, a watch, and a radio to obtain money for liquor, but no charges are filed.

12/24/78 Lionel Dahmer (age 42) and Shari Jordan (age 37) are married.

12/29/78 JD signs enlistment papers for the U.S. Army for a 3-year hitch.

1/12/79 Reports for duty and is posted to Military Police School at Fort McClellan, Anniston, AL. After first month, is regularly in trouble for drunkenness, once leading to discipline of his entire platoon, whereupon he is given a severe beating by platoon mates, rupturing an eardrum.

5/11/79 Having failed in MP training, he is transferred to the Army Hospital School at Fort Sam Houston, near San Antonio, TX, to train as a medical specialist. This training enabled him to learn about sedatives and analgesics.

6/13/79 Completes training as a medical specialist. (Davis [1991] gives this date as 6/22/79.)

7/13/79 Sent to Headquarters Company, Second Battalion, Sixty-eighth Armored Regiment, Mechanized, Eighth Infantry Division, Baumholder, West Germany. Assigned to the Battalion Aid Station. His pattern of drunkenness and disciplinary action therefrom continues.

8/6/80 Joyce calls Bath Township police to report shouting and shoving by her ex-husband. No charges filed.

3/26/81 Dahmer outprocessed 9 months before the end of his hitch at Fort Jackson, SC, for alcohol abuse. Moves to Miami and finds work making sandwiches in a fast food shop, Sunshine Subs, in Miami Beach.

10/81 Returns to live with Lionel and Shari in the Bath Township home. (Davis, 1991, gives the locale as a new townhouse on Granger Township, OH.)

10/7/81 Arrested by Bath Township police for disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and carrying an open container of liquor (vodka) at the Bath Ramada Inn; later fined $60 and sentenced to 10 days in jail; suspended.

12/81 Moves into home of paternal grandmother, Catherine Dahmer, in West Allis, WI. Finds work as a phlebotomist at Milwaukee Blood Plasma, Inc., but is fired for poor performance after 10 months.

1/23/82 JD bought a Colt Lawman .357 magnum revolver that he used for target shooting. When his grandmother learned of it 6 months later and reported this to JD’s father, JD surrendered the weapon to him. JD says it was one of the few possessions that brought him pleasure.

5/82 Lionel awarded custody of David Dahmer.

APPENDIX
Jeffrey Dahmer: A Chronology

*The dates and events recorded in this chronology rest on a dozen or more sources of information on the Dahmer case. These sources resist reconciliation. They are often inconsistent and at times contradictory, even with respect to such basic elements as names and dates. It is therefore inevitable that this rendering contains multiple inaccuracies despite my best efforts to avoid them.*
8/7/82  Arrested for Indecent Exposure by the Wisconsin State Fair Park Police after urinating in front of children. Convicted 8/19/82; fined $50. (Baumann [1991, p. 57], and Norris [1992, p. 134], give this date as 8/8/82.)

8/82 Late  Living on unemployment benefits, commences 2-year period of spending more time with his grandmother. Stops drinking; begins reading the Bible and attending the Apostle Presbyterian Church, 1509 S. 76th St. in West Allis with grandson. Joins church youth group.

12/25/83  Spends Christmas with brother David and his mother who he had not seen since 1978.

1/14/85  Gets job as a laborer at the Ambrosia Chocolate Company, earning $8.25/hr. Assigned to the night shift, 11:00 P.M. to 7:30 A.M.

1985  JD is given a note in a West Allis Public Library by a man offering him oral sex. Although he declined the offer, this event effectively ends the reform plan that was initiated in late August, 1982. He attends church less frequently and starts drinking again.

4/7/85  Arrested for being drunk, abusive, and threatening when a bartender refused to serve him; charged with Disorderly Conduct, Threat to Injure, and City Hindrering. Charges dropped.

8/18/85  Warned by police for making obscene gestures to police officers.

9/8/86  Arrested for Lewd and Lascivious Behavior and Indecent Exposure after being seen masturbating on the banks of the Kinnickinnic River by two 12-year-old boys. Confessed masturbating in public about five times during the preceding months. After 6 months, charge was reduced to Disorderly Conduct; placed on 1 year's probation. (Norris [1992, p. 137] gave this date as 8/8/86.)

3/10/87  Convicted of Disorderly Conduct and sentenced to 1 year, suspended, and a year of probation; ordered to undergo a course of counseling.

11/21/87  Steven W. Tuomi, age 28, murdered by JD at the Ambassador Hotel, 2308 W. Wisconsin Ave., after being picked up at a gay bar, Club 219 at 219 S. 2nd St. (Dahmer [1994] gave this date as 11/27/87; Davis [1991] as 9/15/87; Baumann [1991], Jaeger & Balousek [1991], and Schwartz [1992] gave 9/15/87 as the date Tuomi was last seen; Dvorchak & Holewa [1991] give 9/15/87 as the date Tuomi was reported missing.)

1/7/88  Murders James E. Doxtator, age 14, after picking him up at a bus stop outside Club 219.

3/20/88  Discharged from probation stemming from the conviction for disorderly conduct at the State Fair Park.


4/3/88  Ronald (Ernest) Flowers reports to West Allis police that JD drugged him and stole $240, a neck chain, and a gold bracelet after picking him up outside Club 219. JD interviewed by police but Flowers's blood tests were negative; no charges filed. (Norris [1992, p. 155] gave this date as 4/23/88.)

1988  Joyce Flint, formerly Dahmer, graduates with honors from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire with BA degree in Speech.

9/25/88  Moves from grandmother’s home to an apartment at the Executive Manor, 808 N. 24th St., Milwaukee. Takes the skull of Guerrero with him. (Dahmer [1994] gave this date as 9/26/88, Masters [1993] gave the month of this move as June, Norris [1992] gave this address as 25th Street.)

9/26/88  Molestes Soukhone (Somsack) Sithasomphone, age 13; is arrested and charged with Second Degree Sexual Assault and Enticing a Child for Immoral Purposes. Search of Dahmer’s apartment revealed Halcion, Bailey’s Irish Cream, male nude magazines, and a Polaroid camera but missed the skull of Richard Guerrero.

9/30/88  Freed on $2,500 cash bail.

11/4/88  JD admitted to West Allis Memorial Hospital for treatment of injuries received in a mugging.

1988, Late  or 1989, Early  Joyce Flint moves to Fresno, CA, finding work as a case manager for the Central Valley AIDS Team.

1/30/89  Pled no contest to the charges against him; sentencing set for May, 1989.

3/20/89  Vacates his apartment and moves back to his grandmother’s home in West Allis.

3/25/89  Fills his 14th prescription for sleeping pills. Murders Anthony Sears, age 24, at grandmother’s home after picking him up at La Cage Aux Folles.

5/23/89  Sentenced by Judge Gardner to 5 years for Second Degree Sexual Assault and 3 years for Enticling a Child for Immoral Purposes. Both sentences reduced to 1 year at the House of Correction, later moving to the Community Correctional Center nearer his employer, on work release, followed by 5 years probation. Prohibited from having contact with anyone under age 18. Stores head and genitals of Anthony Sears in his locker at the chocolate factory before entering the House of Correction.

11/23/89  While out on a Thanksgiving Day pass, JD is picked up at Club 219 by an older White male and taken to man’s apartment where he blacked out and awoke hog-tied and suspended from the ceiling with the man sexually assaulting him with a candle.

12/10/89  With the help of a knowledgeable fellow inmate, JD writes Judge Gardner appealing for a reduction of his sentence.

3/1/90  Lionel Dahmer writes to Judge Gardner imploring him to force JD into treatment for alcoholism.

5/2/90  JD released on probation from the Community Correction Center in downtown Milwaukee, 15 blocks from the Oxford Apartments. (Milwaukee Sentinel, 7/24/91, specifies the House of Correction in Franklin.) Lives with Catherine Dahmer until he can find an apartment. Shortly after, he fills a prescription for 30 Halcion tablets and 2 weeks later, another for 60 tablets.

5/30/90  JD joins the Unicorn Bath House in Chicago; went 10 times to 2/1991.

5/13/90  Signs a lease for Apt. 213 at the Oxford Apartments, 924 North 25th St., in a tough, low-rent neighborhood on the west side of Milwaukee. Moves in on 5/14/90. Rent is $300/mo. Begins to plan a decorative shrine for his bedroom to showcase the skulls and other body parts of his victims. Buys a black table to serve as part of a shrine.

5/29 to 6/1/90  Murders Raymond Lamont Smith, AKA Ricky Lee Beeks, age 33, after picking him up at Club 219. (Masters [1993] gave the date as 5/21/90.) Saved the spray-painted skull and placed alongside that of Anthony Sears on his shrine.

6/20, Early  Brings another man back to his apartment but mixes up his own drink with the prospective victim’s potion; wakes up to discover $300, some clothing, and a watch stolen.


7/8/90  JD meets Luis Pinet, a 15-year-old boy living in foster care at the Phoenix Bar. Pinet escapes JD’s apartment after talking JD out of killing him.

9/3/90  Murders Ernest Miller, age 24, after picking him up in front of an adult bookstore. Saved biceps and later ate them.

9/24/90  Murders David C. Thomas, age 22, after picking him up near a gay bar, the C’est La Vie. JD told authorities he didn’t
really like Thomas and did not, therefore, keep any of his re-
mains.

9/25/90 JD robbed at gunpoint of $10 and his bus pass. (Schwartz 
[1992, p. 82] gave this date as 9/24/90.)

11/90 JD joins Lionel and Shari Dahmer at grandmother’s home for 
Thanksgiving.

2/11/91 Begins 2-week vacation.

2/18/91 Murders Curtis Straughter, age 18, after picking him at a bus 
stop near Marquette University.

3/25/91 Reports to probation officer that his mother had called, the 
first time they had spoken in 5 years, and had said his homo-
sexuality was no problem for her and that she loved him.

4/7/91 Murders Errol Lindsey, age 19, after picking him up at a key 
shop two blocks from JD’s apartment.

5/24/91 Murders an acquaintance of a year or so, Anthony Hughes, 
described by Dvorchak and Holewa (1991) as a deaf-mute, 
age 31, after picking him up at Club 219.

5/27/91 Murders Konerak Sinthasomphone, age 14, the younger 
brother of Sounthome (Somsack) Sinthasomphone after 
picking him up at the Grand Avenue Mall.

6/30/91 Murders Matt Turner, AKA Donald Montrell, age 20, after 
picking him up at a Chicago Greyhound station following a 
Gay Pride parade.

7/5/91 to 
Murders Jeremiah “Jeremy” Weinberger, age 23, in Milwau-
kee after picking him up at a Chicago gay dance club, Carol’s 
Speakeasy.

7/15/91 Murders Oliver Lacy, age 23, after picking him up two blocks 
from JD’s apartment; saves his heart “to eat later.” Fired from 
his job at the Ambrosia Chocolate Co. for absenteeism. At 
his next appointment, confides to his probation officer that he 
is seriously contemplating suicide.

8/4/91 Remains of Steven Hicks recovered in Bath Township.

8/6/91 JD charged with eight more counts of intentional homicide; 
bail increased to $5 million.

8/22/91 JD charged with three more murders.

9/17/91 JD charged with the murder of Steven Hicks.

1/13/92 JD changes plea to guilty in Milwaukee.

1/27/92 Insanity trial begins in Milwaukee.

2/15/92 JD found not insane.

2/17/92 JD sentenced to 15 consecutive life terms in prison.


5/1/92 JD pleads guilty in Akron, OH, to the murder of Steven 
Hicks.

3/94 JD’s mother, Joyce Flint, attempts suicide via an overdose of 
poisons and lying next to an open gas oven.

5/10/94 JD is baptized into the Church of God.

7/3/94 JD attacked in the prison chapel by another inmate with a ra-
zor blade but suffered only minor injuries; did not press 
charges.

11/28/94 JD and another inmate, Jesse Anderson, are bludgeoned to 
death in the bathrooms at the gym of the Columbia Correc-
tional Institution, Portage, WI, by inmate Christopher 
Scarver, 25. Scarver asserted that he was the million-year-old 
“son of God,” acting on his “father’s” commands.

9/18/95 JD’s remains, with the exception of his brain, cremated.

10/3/95 Hearing before Judge Daniel S. George over the disposition 
of JD’s brain, which his mother wishes to make available for 
scientific study and his father wishes to cremate. Judge 
George issued an order for cremation on 12/12/95.

5/21/96 JD’s mother, Joyce Flint, attempts suicide in her Fresno, CA, 
garage via carbon monoxide poisoning on JD’s birthday.

11/27/00 Joyce Flint dies of breast cancer at age 64.

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