

## Conexões sociais importam: uma visão analítico-funcional geral da série da Netflix sobre o Jeffrey Dahmer

### Social connectedness matters: a functional analytic overview of Jeffrey Dahmer's Netflix Series

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**Resumo:** Este artigo observou a vida de Dahmer de acordo com a série da Netflix se baseando nos princípios da Psicoterapia Analítica Funcional (FAP), focando no seu relacionamento com o seu pai, sua mãe, e sua madrasta. As causas do comportamento anormal podem ser entendidas utilizando a análise do comportamento e os princípios da FAP, em que demonstramos que as causas podem ter início na história do relacionamento pessoa-contexto e não, necessariamente, em um trauma específico ou distúrbio físico/cerebral. Para observar esses comportamentos, identificamos e sistematizamos 18 diálogos entre Dahmer e seus parentes durante a série da Netflix e analisamos os diálogos que ocorreram durante o episódio. Como apresentado neste artigo, a vida de Dahmer demonstra como a conectividade social é importante e destaca como os princípios da FAP são importantes como psicoterapia e um estilo de vida. Muitos outros aspectos dos diálogos de Dahmer e da sua vida podem ser (e devem ser) analisados para entender o seu comportamento.

**Palavras-chave:** Terapia analítico-funcional, Dahmer, relacionamento, behaviorismo.

**Abstract:** This article examines Dahmer's life according to the Netflix TV series based on Functional Analytic Behavior Psychotherapy (FAP) principles, focusing on his relationship with his father, mother, and stepmother. The causes of abnormal behavior can be understood utilizing behavior analysis and FAP's principles, as we demonstrate that its causes can be founded in the person-context relationship history and not necessarily in a specific trauma or physical/brain disorder. To examine these behaviors, we identified and systematized 18 dialogues between Dahmer and his relatives during the Netflix TV series and analyzed the dialogues during the episode. As presented in this article, Dahmer's life shows how social connectedness matters and highlights how the FAP principles are important as psychotherapy and a way of life. Several other aspects of Dahmer's dialogues and life can be (and must be) analyzed to understand his behavior.

**Keywords:** Functional analytic-therapy, Dahmer, relationship, behaviorism.

Training clinical skills is an important aspect for clinical psychologists. This can be done during graduate and postgraduate programs that offer practical disciplines. However, clinical logic can be applied to other contexts, such as music, movies, and television (TV) series. For instance, a psychologist can analyze a character's behaviors (verbal and nonverbal) from a movie and outline possible explanations for these behaviors according to his/her theoretical basis. These explanations can be shared with other psychologists and students aiming to validate or invalidate the logic used. This is a theoretical exercise that can contribute to the fluency of clinical thinking. The present manuscript is that kind of clinical exercise.

Here, we examined the life of Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer, presented by the fictional Netflix TV series. Dahmer was considered a psychopath (Higgs, 2012), and the causes of his behaviors depend on multiple levels of analysis, such as interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial analysis (Hare, 1999; Hare & Neumann, 2008). Our analysis was based on Functional Analytic Behavior Psychotherapy (FAP) principles (Landes et al., 2013), focusing on Dahmer's relationship with his father, mother, and stepmother. Our goal is to demonstrate how behavior analysis and FAP's principles can help to understand abnormal behavior and that its causes can be founded in the person-context relationship history and not necessarily in a specific trauma or physical/brain disorder. However, it is important to highlight that our analysis is limited to fictional characteristics presented during the TV series. Thus, it does not represent the actual contingencies of Dahmer's life. Additionally, our analysis was made based on a script and, therefore, does not allow any conclusions about pathological behaviors but can offer a FAP perspective of the behavioral relationships established by Dahmer.

FAP has its foundations grounded in radical behaviorism (Kohlenberg & Tsai, 1994) and works as an interpersonally-oriented psychotherapy focused on how people relate to each other (Callaghan, 2006). Relationships can be seen as behavioral classes, and in a radical behavioristic approach, the behavior is defined as anything people do publicly (e.g., talking, walking, dancing) or privately (feeling, thinking). Additionally, in this approach, how

people behave is understood as quantifiable, predictable, and controllable (Kuroda, 2020), so scientists and practitioners explain and intervene in behavior based on analyzing historical and current contingencies that people are exposed to. According to FAP, our psychological health will be affected by the quality of human relationships (Smith et al., 2023; Toh et al., 2022). Thus, FAP techniques are well-suited for people suffering from interpersonal problems, personality disorders, and difficulty establishing intimate relationships (Kohlenberg et al., 1999; Smith et al., 2023).

An intimate relationship has at its core the Interpersonal Model (Kanter et al., 2020), which describes a condition in which a "speaker" shows vulnerability and the "listener" shows empathy and acts comprehensively and affectionately (Caprariello & Reis, 2011). Thus, in this model, a person can truly behave with others, be genuine and authentic, and have their behaviors shaped by health interactions (Toh et al., 2022). In contrast, when a person continuously faces social stressors in interactions without intimacy, it causes psychological problems and abnormal behaviors. As in the snowball metaphor, these psychological problems become new social stressors for other people and so on (Koerner et al., 1996).

Some of the impacts of social stressors on psychological health were presented by Holt-Lundstad et al. (2010) in a meta-analysis. They observed that people living in social isolation or without relations with intimacy had more risk of mortality. Kiecolt-Glaser et al. (2010) also observed that the lack of intimacy and social isolation could affect our immune and cardiovascular systems. Thus, how people relate to each other greatly impacts their well-being (Holman et al., 2017) and how they will behave in the future. For some people, it can lead to health problems, but for others, we might consider that it could lead to abnormal behavior, such as Dahmer's crimes.

Maintaining intimate relationships was one of the biggest problems Dahmer faced. However, these problems did not emerge only when he became a "serial killer." If we analyze his interactions with his relatives, we can find variables that could have served as initial conditions for Dahmer's abnormal behaviors. To do so, we identified and systematized 18 dialogues between Dahmer and his

relatives during the Netflix TV series that represent interpersonal failures faced by Dahmer during his life, and that could help us to understand why he behaved so differently from other people. Below, we show all the dialogues (D) we have systematized, separated by the episodes (E) in which each one occurred and the characters' names.

Additionally, we analyze the dialogues that occurred during the episode. We consider these dialogues relevant classes of stimuli and responses during relevant interactions between Dahmer and his relatives (at least for the present manuscript). Of course, several other important dialogues might exemplify Dahmer's life, but we chose those that best represent problems in his relations with relatives.

All the transcriptions were based on the closed captions from Netflix.

## E2 – Please Don't Go<sup>1</sup>

Before we start, it is important to describe that D1 occurred moments after Dahmer's mother overdosed on a suicide attempt.

### D1

**Dad:** What happened? She finally do it? She kill herself?

**Medic 1:** Sir, you gotta step back.

**Medic 2:** Gonna get her to the hospital.

**Dad:** She's fakin' it. She's done it before.

**Cop:** Mr. Dahmer, calm down, please.

**Dad:** Bravo, Joyce! You're a real good actress.

**Cop:** No! Mr. Dahmer, your wife had an overdose.

**Dad:** Who called the ambulance?

**Cop:** Your son did.

**Dad:** Goddammit. Hey, Jeff. That was good, callin' the ambulance.

**Jeffrey:** Okay.

### D2

**Mom:** Where are you running off to now?

**Dad:** Nobody's running.

**Mom:** You always find time for everything but your family.

**Dad:** That's a lie.

**Mom:** Oh, God, you're a failure as a father.

**Dad:** Oh, and I'm a bad father, why? Because I have to go to work?

**Mom:** Yeah. I mean, that's right. You don't spend any time with him.

**Dad:** Oh, that's a load of... What about you, Joyce? With your drugs and cryin' your eyes out every day.

**Mom:** Oh, fuck you. You're not a doctor! You don't get to tell me about *my* medication!

**Dad:** Your pills.

**Mom:** Fuck you.

**Dad:** Fuck *you*.

**Mom:** Get out!

**Dad:** Oh, I will.

**Mom:** Just get out.

**Dad:** I am. Gonna be the best three days of my life!

**Mom:** Get out!

**Dad:** Jesus!

**Jeffrey:** Dad? Please don't go.

**Dad:** Jeff, I'm only be gone for three days. It's for work. I told you this.

### D3

**Dad:** Oh man. There he is. Look at that.

**Jeffrey:** What is it? A rat?

**Dad:** Oh, too big for a rat. That's an opossum. They got the same sort of body as a rat, but this guy's a marsupial. Only marsupial in North America. Oh no, Jeff. Actually, it's fine to be curious. Just be sure to wash your hands, okay?

**Jeffrey:** How'd he died?

<sup>1</sup> The titles of the episodes and all the transcriptions are based on the Netflix descriptions. Thus, colloquial language will be present in parts of this manuscript.

**Dad:** Don't know. Let's take a look. Well, he could've just died 'cause it doesn't like somebody ate him. Oh! Han on a sec. Look at that. He's got a hole in his skull. Right there. Somebody must've bit through it. Coyote or something. Look, you can see it, it's crushed. Yeah, he must've gotten away and run under here. Coyote couldn't get after him.

**Jeffrey:** With his head all crushed? With, like, a hole in it?

**Dad:** Well, that's amazing what the brain can do. Take a lot of damage. You know, one of my professor, we did this experiment where you take a frog and you actually cut off his head. You take out most of the brain. Just leave a small part, just the stem, so he'll keep breathing, his heart'll keep beating, but he can't think anything. Can't feel anything either. But then my professor showed us, you take a cotton ball, you did it in acid and then dab it on the little bit of brain that's left, and guess what?

**Jeffrey:** What?

**Dad:** The frog's hands try to wipe the cotton ball away. Which, yeah, I know it shouldn't be able to do. The part of the brain that knows how to do that is gone. It's a fascinating thing, the brain.

**Jeffrey:** They're like fiddlesticks.

**Dad:** C'mon, let's wash your hands.

#### D4

**Mom:** I won't have it! It's macabre. It's unsanitary.

**Dad:** Finally, this is something he's showing interest in. He's in his own world half the time, Joy, since the surgery.

**Mom:** Well, that's not *my* fault!

**Dad:** Why don't you take another pill, Joyce?

**Mom:** You, just get out of the house! Get the fuck out!

**Dad:** A knife? You Gonna kill me? I'm not a black bear in one of your nightmares.

**Mom:** Fuck you!

**Dad:** Oh, goddammit! You know what would calm you down, Joyce? A fucking lobotomy.

#### D5

**Dad:** Do hopefully this isn't gonna spill everywhere.

**Jeffrey:** Oh wow!

**Dad:** You know you and I have 20 feet of small intestine. This fella's an omnivore, just like us. We should measure how long his is. We don't wanna cut yet. Why don't ya... Why don't you just pull it out and start the side? Good job, Jeff. Whoa. There it is. The heart. Neat, huh?

**Jeffrey:** Dad, are you gonna leave?

**Dad:** No, We're gonna have dinner here in a bit.

**Jeffrey:** No. I mean... are you and mom gonna get divorced?

**Dad:** Uh...

#### D6

**Dad:** My guess is you miss the army. All those years of structure, you know?

**Jeffrey:** Yeah. Maybe.

**Dad:** You have a girlfriend? Are you meeting any girls?

**Jeffrey:** No. Not really.

**Dad:** Are you drunk? 'Cause every Sunday when I call, you're always slurring. Are you drinking now?

**Jeffrey:** No. Just, well, it's the weekend, you know. I got nothing else to do. I'm all by myself.

**Dad:** Who was it said after they got discharged that, "I'm gonna go to Miami"?

**Jeffrey:** Well, you're the one who told me I needed to get out in the world. I don't like it. I ain't got no Money. Dad, can I please come home? Hey, dad. Can I please come home?

#### D7

**Dad:** I'm gonna expect a certain level of behavior. That's the deal.

**Jeffrey:** I know.

**Dad:** you gotta respect your grandma. Her house, her rules. No getting drunk. And you gotta look for a job. That's the deal.



**Jeffrey:** I will. Look, roadkill.

## D8

**Grandmother:** Oh. That Mr. Roper! What a character. It's been so nice having you here, Jeff, but you don't have to have dinner with me every night, you know.

**Jeffrey:** I don't mind.

**Grandmother:** I know, hon. But you should get out there, make some friends. Date a nice girls. There's a really nice gal at my church, and I don't think she's seeing anybody. Oh, what is her name? Oh, Barb, I think. Oh, Barb Novak. If you come to church, I'll introduce you to her. Oh, she's a lovely christian girl. Teaches at a preschool, I think.

**Jeffrey:** Oh. Okay, yeah.

During dialogues D1 and D2, we can observe an example of Dahmer's parents' relationship. D1 shows that Dahmer's father did not believe in the health problems of Dahmer's mother, treating her overdose as something she was faking and showing no empathy with her problems. When the father talked to Dahmer, he did not ask how he felt; he just thanked him for calling an ambulance. D2 shows the beginning of his parent's divorce. They acted as if Dahmer was not present at the moment, and, once again, when the father talked to Dahmer, there was no concern about his feelings. This scene greatly represents the lack of social connectedness between Dahmer and his father. Once social connectedness is essential to maintain and improve physical and psychological well-being (Cohen, 2004), we can observe that Dahmer had no environment in which to develop intimacy.

D1 and D2 show the lack of the principles of good relations according to FAP. There was no empathy between Dahmer's parents and no room for him to be vulnerable since they did not bother to listen to his feelings. At this time, Dahmer was a child. This is an example of a parenting problem during Dahmer's childhood. His parents did not show empathy toward his emotions, and thus, they did not create conditions for Dahmer to learn from his parents how to deal with bad feelings (Whittingham, 2015). This experience could

demonstrate that he should not care about other people's feelings and that aggressive speeches and acts constitute relationships. This *posteriori* analysis hypothesizes that it could have taught Dahmer that being aggressive with others is the only way to have a relationship.

Dialogues D3 and D5 are important to understanding how Dahmer's interests and values were created. They show moments of interaction between Dahmer and his father. It only occurred when the context involved hurt or dead animals. As a stimuli class, we can say Dahmer received attention only when he was in the presence of something broken or dead. During D5, there are two important factors: a) they were dissecting an animal, and then his father said they would have dinner soon. Here, we can hypothesize a possible pairing between a discectomy and food consumption, helping to understand the cannibalism that Dahmer presented; b) the other factor is when Dahmer asked his father about the divorce and the attention was withdrawn, making it impossible for him to talk about his feelings. D4 is another example that Dahmer's parent's relationship was based on aggressive behaviors, and that cure for it would be drugs (i.e., pills) or a lobotomy. This could have served as an initial context for Dahmer's abuse of alcohol (e.g., as a stimulus similar to pills).

Dialogue D6 shows Dahmer trying to be vulnerable with his father and talking about living alone. However, his father did not pay attention to this information and just said that Dahmer was in this condition because he asked for it. D6 is an important dialogue to understand that Dahmer had some improvement gaps. However, his relatives should have taken advantage of it or taken him to a professional who could observe and develop it. The same occurred during D8. His grandmother did not wonder why Dahmer did not go out with other people; he just said he should meet a girl. Thus, there was no room for feelings in his relationships, only remaining aggressive speeches or abnormal behavior that produced the attention of others. D7 clearly shows what stimulus was controlling Dahmers behavior: roadkill instead the rules his father was establishing. This is an interesting fact because the moments of interaction between Dahmer and his father when Dahmer was a child involved – basically - roadkills.

Thus, in a moment of pressure, Dahmer might try to interact better with his father, using the only way he learned to do that.

## E3 – Doin' A Dahmer

### D8

**Dad:** There we go. Got one. Nice, nice, nice. Here, you take it. Okay. Okay.

**Jeffrey:** Dang, it's really small.

**Dad:** Oh, no, no. A nice size. We'll eat him. Okay. All right. Now I'm gonna show you how to put a worm on a hook. Let me get a nice big one here. Now this... This is the head, and you want to keep it wiggling. So, I have to kinda imagine where the ass'd be. And, uh, that's where you get the hook to penetrate. Go ahead. It'll wiggle a little.

**Jeffrey:** Right there?

**Dad:** Yeah. Ow. Sorry, pal. That's gotta hurt. I don't know. Maybe it's, like, a girl worm. And maybe you're just stickin' it in her. I'm sure, you know, you and your buddies, that's all you talk about in school, right? Girls?

**Jeffrey:** Like that?

**Dad:** Yeah. Attaboy. Now just take the head there, and just wrap it around a couple of times, and then stick it in the side.

**Jeffrey:** Wow.

**Dad:** Yeah, there you go. Now, that way, it's alive, but, you know, it can't fall off, and the fish can't take it off. Well, let's see what else is out there.

**Jeffrey:** Okay.

**Dad:** So, you dating any girls at school?

**Jeffrey:** I don't really like any of 'em.

**Dad:** Right. Yeah. But you know how it works. Right? When a man and a woman, you know, have sex? I'm sure your friends, you know... Somebody's got a *Playboy* in his locker.

**Jeffrey:** We don't have to talk about this, dad.

### D9

**Chazz:** Hey, Dahmer. Do that thing you did in Spanish class. It was hilarious.

**Jeffrey:** What?

**Chazz:** That guy your mom knows, who's all... fucked up.

**Jeffrey:** Ah! You should put blue curtains in there!

**Chazz:** That's so funny, man. That's what they call "doing a Dahmer".

**Jeffrey:** No! Silence! Joyce! Put down the knife, Joyce! Put it down!

**Chazz:** All right.

**Jeffrey:** Peace.

### D10

**Teacher:** Okay, guys. Just remember, these scalpels are razor sharp, okay? So when you give it to your partner, you put it down and then let them pick it up. Denise.

**Denise:** Do we have to do this?

**Teacher:** Yes.

**Denise:** Okay, but I'm a vegetarian.

**Chazz:** Fuck you.

**Teacher:** Okay, Chazz. That is enough, thank you. Yes, this is mandatory. Anatomy is part of science. It's how we learn about the human body, Denise. And besides, these pigs are already dead, okay?

**Denise:** Yeah, but they didn't just die. They got killed so we could dissect them.

**Jeffrey:** Shut up, Denise. We want to do this.

**Teacher:** Okay, Jeff. Thank you. That's enough. All right, guys. Please be very careful. No trips to the emergency room today. Good. Now, you may need to cut through the sternum in order to expose the chest cavity. Now, be real careful with that. Good. Okay, now let's go ahead and remove the pericardium. That is the membrane surrounding the heart. No, Jeff, don't take the heart out yet.

**Jeffrey:** Sorry.

### D11

**Teacher:** Hey, good work today, Jeff. I could tell you really got into that.

**Jeffrey:** Yeah, I really enjoyed that.

**Teacher:** Good.

**Jeffrey:** You think I could take one home? Just to practice.

**Teacher:** Gonna be honest with you, Jeff, I've been, uh, teaching for 22 years, and no one's ever asked me that. Um... Sure.

**Jeffrey:** Thanks.

### D12

**Chazz:** Dude! Wasn't that fun? Shutting down that fucking bitch, Denise?

**Jeffrey:** Yeah, she's like fucking worst partner. Hey, man. I got another one. You wanna come over?

**Chazz:** Another what?

**Jeffrey:** Another pig. Bertoglio gave me one. Wanna come over and dissect it?

**Chazz:** Wait, are you fucking kidding me? No.

### D13

**Jeffrey:** What are you watching?

**Dad:** Oh, hi, Jeff. Uh, would you turn the TV off and sit? It's been really hard around here for me. And, uh... some things have got to change. Uh, they have to change because I can't function like this.

**Jeffrey:** Am I... I'm gonna stay with you, right? I get to live with you?

**Dad:** Oh, we'll figure that out. Mmm. What's that smell?

**Jeffrey:** Uh... It's my fetal pig.

**Dad:** Oh!

**Jeffrey:** We're dissecting them in class.

**Dad:** Oh, that's good. You keep at that. You're a good boy, Jeff.

Dialogue D8 shows an attempt by Dahmer's father to talk to him about sex. As we can see, he did not properly initiate a conversation about this theme; he just put this information in the middle of the fishing activity. Additionally, he did not wonder what Dahmer thought or knew about it, given that there was no space for Dahmer to be genuine with him. Another important fact about this moment is that he treats the sex relation as putting a worm on a hook, creating another possible paring for Dahmer: sex is similar to hurting something. This paring might sum with others and can be resumed in the following form: broken or dead things were paired with attention and food consumption; aggressive speeches were paired with relationships; hurt something with a hook was paired with sex. In contrast, talking about feelings and being genuine about life do not produce attention. These pairings could be used to understand the normal sources of Dahmer's abnormal behaviors during his life.

Dialogue D9 demonstrates Dahmer imitating his parents' fight in front of his colleagues and how it produced their attention. This is an example of how an abnormal behavior starts as an imitation and becomes to be shaped by the effects it has on others. Once again, to get attention, Dahmer behaves aggressively. This aggressive speech returns during D10, when Dahmer tells the girl to shut up, as his father does with his mother. Instead of punishing Dahmer, the teacher thanked him and continued the class, possibly strengthening this behavior. At the end of the class, the teacher, once again, praised Dahmer, saying "good work today" (D11), but did not specify the behavior he was praising. In addition, Dahmer gets the teacher's attention by dissecting an animal (similar to what happens with his father). D12 shows Dahmer trying to use the context of dissecting something to hang out with a colleague and being punished for it. In contrast, during D13, Dahmer's father gave attention and praised him for dissecting the animal at home.



## E4 – The Good Boy Box

### D14

**Dad:** This house looks like a tornado hit it.

**Jeffrey:** Didn't know you guys were coming.

**Dad:** What the heck's going on here? What's with all the alcohol, Jeff?

**Jeffrey:** Just threw a party.

**Dad:** Well, look around, why don't you? This place is a mess!

**Jeffrey:** So is this her?

**Dad:** Shari. This is Jeff. Jeez, Jeff.

**Shari:** Hi, Jeff.

**Jeffrey:** Hi.

**Dad:** Where's your mom at?

**Jeffrey:** I don't know. She left.

**Dad:** Well, where'd she go?

**Jeffrey:** I don't know.

**Dad:** Well, when did she leave?

**Jeffrey:** Like, three months ago.

**Dad:** I'm Sorry, what? / It's always been the same with her. The only person she's ever thought of was herself. And here she's, leaving an 18-year-old boy alone in the house. Nobody to cook for him or anything. God knows what you've been eating. Honestly, it's criminal that she would do that... Goddammit. Excuse me.

**Jeffrey:** Dad. I'm okay.

**Dad:** No, Jeff you're not okay. You've been drinking. I saw the empty cans, and I smell it on you. You're not okay. Come on, I want you to drink that.

**Jeffrey:** I don't like coffee.

**Dad:** Yeah, well, I need you to sober up because this is important. Because we have to figure out how we're gonna get your life in order, okay? Okay?

**Shari:** Oh! That's an awful lot of sugar, Jeff.

**Jeffrey:** What do you care? You're not my mom. I just met you.

**Dad:** Jeff!

**Shari:** No, Lionel, it's okay. It's okay.

**Dad:** I don't know what to say.

**Shari:** You're right, Jeff. I'm not your mom. But I love your father, which means I love you, okay? Sometimes that's gonna come in the form of tough love.

**Dad:** Well, you managed to graduate. That's, um, that's an accomplishment.

**Jeffrey:** Barely. But yeah.

**Dad:** You applied to any colleges?

**Jeffrey:** No.

**Dad:** You know, Jeff... I mean, what the heck... Jeff... What have you been doing? It's probably too late now.

**Jeffrey:** That's why I didn't apply.

**Dad:** Jeff... You know, you were always so good at science. It's... I don't... I don't know.

**Jeffrey:** I know most of the guys who are going to college for science, and they get... they get good grades and stuff. My grades are shit.

**Shari:** Well, but what about Community college?

**Jeffrey:** Community college, that's, like, for failures.

**Dad:** Well, I mean, that might be where we're at.

**Jeffrey:** Yeah. But, like, uh... That's what I am. Why am I trying to pretend to be something I'm not? You know? I'm not a good kid. Dad, I'm not a normal guy. I don't fit in. I'm weird. I don't... I'm different from everybody else. There's something wrong with me, I think.

**Dad:** Jeff, Jeff, Jeff, just come on. Don't do this. This is-

**Jeffrey:** No, I'm serious, dad. There's things that I want to do, and... And there's stuff that I've done that I, uh... I don't know... I think I should tell you about... About, uh... About some of the fantasies that I've had.

**Dad:** Okay, stop, wait a minute. Is this sex stuff you're talking about here?

**Jeffrey:** Yeah. That's part of it.

**Dad:** You know what? Hey, I'm sorry. I just got an idea. Just...

**Shari:** What?

**Dad:** Um... Ohio State. We're gonna get him into Ohio State. We are. We're gonna get you into Ohio State. Huh? Yeah, I'll even pay for the first semester. Got a great science program. What do you think? Huh?

**Jeffrey:** I think... I think that sounds good.

**Dad:** Good. It's decided then. That's what we're gonna do.

**Jeffrey:** Okay.

**Dad:** What do you think?

**Shari:** I think it's a great idea. Are you kidding?

## D15

**Jeffrey:** Grandma, what's in this box?

**Grandmother:** Oh, those are photos of your father. You want to take a look?

**Jeffrey:** Yeah.

**Grandmother:** Just turn this key right here. It's a nice click. Oh! Here's your father. I can't remember what birthday that was. Maybe five? Oh. Look at him. Such a dear, dear boy. Now, here, that's the science fair. He's holding up a ribbon, so he must have won a prize. Here, he's much older. This is a family reunion at your Great-Uncle Roland's house in Stevens Point. He was a good boy, your father, his whole life.

**Jeffrey:** Wish I had a box like that.

**Grandmother:** Well, you could have this one, I suppose. What do you need a box for?

**Jeffrey:** No, I mean, I don't even have any memories like that to put in a box. I haven't won a ribbon for anything my whole life. Like a... a bad egg. I got a screw loose up her or something.

**Grandmother:** Jeff Dahmer, you look at me. There

isn't a thing wrong with you that we can't fix. I think you just need to find a nice girl, that's all. And also, there's the drinking. Now, that is a problem.

**Jeffrey:** I've hardly been drinking at all, Grandma.

**Grandmother:** I still think you could do better, wouldn't you say? And I know I'm just a worn-out, broken record here, but I think you should start coming back to church again.

**Jeffrey:** Uh-huh.

**Grandmother:** Uh-huh. Because the things you do that set you off course, the alcohol, the keeping to yourself and stewing in your own thoughts, those are temptations, Jeff. And I think if you come back to church, it would help you understand and resist those temptations.

**Jeffrey:** What do you think's tempting me? The devil?

**Grandmother:** Yeah. Absolutely, I do. You're a good boy, Jeff. You're every bit as good as your father. You just have different challenges than he did. Everybody's got something different they're fighting with. You're good deep down, Jeff. You may not believe it, but I sure do.

**Jeffrey:** Thanks, Grandma.

## D16

**Jeffrey:** Hey, Grandma. I'm home. Grandma! Grandma, where's my thing?

**Grandmother:** What?

**Jeffrey:** You know, my... mannequin.

**Grandmother:** What do you have that for? Where'd you get that?

**Jeffrey:** I'm not telling you until you tell me where it is.

**Grandmother:** What do you have that for, Jeff? Jeff, I want to tell you something. I love you no matter what. Do you have, you know, feelings for-

**Jeffrey:** No, I don't wanna talk about that.

**Grandmother:** 'Cause if you did, we could go to church and pray about it because the Lord Jesus Christ can do amazing-

**Jeffrey:** Where is my fucking mannequin? I told you not to go in there! It is my room, it is my stuff, so fucking tell me where it is!

**Grandmother:** I don't think it's healthy! I... I threw it away.

**Jeffrey:** You threw it away?

**Grandmother:** Yes. The garbage man took it this afternoon.

**Jeffrey:** Goddammit! God-fucking-dammit!

Dialogue D14 is another example of Dahmer's attempt to be vulnerable with his father, but he did not receive any attention. Dahmer tried to tell his father he was different from others, but when he did that, his father changed the subject and treated it as a weakness. All of this occurred the first time Dahmer saw his stepmother. Thus, a different person was added to his life without any explanation, which became a context for punishment.

Dialogues D15 and D16 show the religious elements in Dahmer's life. First, during D15, Dahmer tried to tell his feelings to his grandmother. She reacted better than his father usually does but denied Dahmer's feelings, telling him not to think about these things. In the end, she says that he should go to the church and states that the "devil" might have tempted him, creating a condition in which Dahmer could believe that something bad was with him. During D16, the grandmother's religious speech extends to the abnormal behavior that Dahmer presented. He started to relate to a mannequin, which is very interesting because this object looked like a human body but did not punish or criticize his feelings, contrary to what others have done throughout his life.

## E5 – Blood On Their Hands

### D17

**Jeffrey:** Hey, dad.

**Dad:** Hey!

**Jeffrey:** Good to see you.

**Dad:** Yeah. Hey, Jeff. Ah. You look great.

**Jeffrey:** Hey.

**Dad:** You lost some weight.

**Jeffrey:** Well, that's good to hear.

**Dad:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** Good thing was I got to lift weights a lot. And read a lot. And going to work every day, that helped.

**Dad:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey:** But, yeah, being doing good, you know. Behaving myself.

**Dad:** Great. Just... That's just great. Um, well, so you're gonna be staying with your grandma for a week and that's it. And then you gotta find an apartment on your own. But Shari and I will help you with that.

**Jeffrey:** Okay.

**Dad:** Um... Jeff, when you were in there, uh... uh, did anybody help you? You know, like a psychologist, or did you talk to anybody, like a counselor?

**Jeffrey:** About what?

**Dad:** Um, anything. Um, you know, alcohol for one or, um... you know, just how you're... You know, what's going on inside of you. Or maybe, um, you know, some guidance on how you're meant to be, um... You know... You know, contribute to society. I don't know. Just, you know, stuff I wasn't able to teach you.

**Jeffrey:** No. They just leave me alone in there. I just kept to myself the whole time. That was kind of the best part. Come on. You said we could stop for hamburgers.

**Dad:** Yeah. Um. Here. Why don't you warm up the car? I'm parked down at the very end. I'm gonna hit the john.

**Jeffrey:** Okay.

Dialogue D17 shows the context in which Dahmer was arrested. His father paid attention to Dahmer's weight loss but did not ask how he felt about what happened in prison or what good behavior Dahmer mentioned. The only time his father thought a professional could help Dahmer was

when he did not explain it to him; he just said that a psychologist or a counselor could help him contribute to society.

## E8 – Lionel

### D18

**Jeffrey:** Guess I really done it this time, huh? Sorry, dad.

**Dad:** No, it's okay. It's okay. It's okay. Come on. Take a sit. Because we got, uh... I gotta... I gotta... We... I don't know where to begin.

**Jeffrey:** How's grandma?

**Dad:** Oh, she's good. She sends her love.

**Jeffrey:** 'Kay. Did you ever get around to fixing that AC?

**Dad:** I don't know what to say.

**Jeffrey:** 'Kay. Well... neither do I.

**Dad:** I didn't realize how sick you were. You need help.

**Jeffrey:** 'Kay.

**Dad:** No, I mean... You know, like from a professional. Because I still think you can be treated. You know what? 'Cause I... You know, I have to hope you can get better.

**Jeffrey:** Oh.

**Dad:** 'Cause I just... I've been trying to think how this all happened. 'Cause I didn't raise you to be like this.

**Jeffrey:** Yeah.

**Dad:** So why do you think you... Why'd you do it?

**Jeffrey:** I don't know.

**Dad:** Okay. Well, see, now, that's not gonna cut it.

**Jeffrey:** Well, sorry.

**Dad:** Well, Jeff... I don't need you to say sorry. I need to know why. Because there needs to be some responsibility here. What you've done to the family, to grandma, to Shari and me.

**Jeffrey:** Hm.

**Dad:** I mean, do you- Do you have any ideia how this all started?

**Jeffrey:** I don't know... I mean, I've been... thinking about it. A lot. You know? So I used to... Well... Remember when you used to take me to go and find roadkill and we'd cut 'em up?

**Dad:** No, no, no. You're not gonna lay this on me, no. No.

**Jeffrey:** 'Kay.

**Dad:** It's not my fault. I didn't do this. I was a good dad to you.

**Jeffrey:** I know.

**Dad:** I mean, I... What? Ah... Uh... All I... What I was doing was I was showing concern for my son who finally showed an interest in something.

**Jeffrey:** It's okay, dad.

**Dad:** You know, what you did, I didn't teach you how to do that.

**Jeffrey:** Don't.

**Dad:** You hear me?

**Jeffrey:** 'Kay.

**Dad:** I didn't do this!

Dialogue D18 shows Dahmer trying to understand the sources of his abnormal behavior during a conversation with his father. At the same time, his father denied participation and threw all the blame on Dahmer's shoulders. In addition, we can see that Dahmer did not show great emotions toward his father's feelings, something that his father did with him all his life.

## Normal sources of pathological behavior

When abnormal behaviors are presented, it is common for people to look for unique causes, traumas, or physical disorders to explain these behaviors. The same occurred to Dahmer. When he died, peo-



ple asked for his brain to make studies aiming to identify some physical cause for his acts. His family did not accept this. However, even if that had happened, we could not say what came first: the physical/brain disorder that caused the abnormal behaviors or the contextual events that caused the abnormal behavior and the physical/brain disorder. Additionally, as psychologists, we can only deal with the contextual aspects. Thus, we should always look for the contingencies of life.

Since Jeff was a kid, he was exposed to stressful contexts involving drug abuse, emotional avoidance, and aggressive behaviors between his parents and between his parents and himself. His mother presented behavioral problems such as depression and excessive use of medicaments. At the same time, her husband (Dahmer's father) invalidated her emotions, behaviors, and suicide attempts, as well as her position as a mother and professional life. Thus, her behavior problems seem to reflect a kind of experiential avoidance (Levin et al., 2014; Orcutt et al., 2020) in addition to a search for well-being.

Dahmer's father presented a very emotionally cold, disqualifying, and invalidating behavior pattern with him and his wife (Dahmer's mother). Additionally, he seemed to be homophobic, sexist, emotionally abusive towards his wife and other women, and somewhat abusive towards animals. It might be demonstrated to Dahmer that the feelings of others should not be considered, even during sex. As a result, Dahmer learned that sex could be violent and unlinked from any affectivity, showing how parents deal with their children's emotions with the occurrence of aggressive behavior and the development of affection for others (Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002).

Thus, Dahmer was faced with abusive behaviors and very stressful interactions from a very early age. He was not taught to talk about his inner world throughout his life story. On the contrary, he was punished for his attempts to report or demonstrate any of his desires, preferences, or difficulties. Therefore, he was not stimulated to develop self-knowledge, a healthy self, self-confidence or self-esteem, relationships of intimacy and trust, being vulnerable and caring relationships. Consequently, Dahmer did not learn to consider others' wishes or values as well as his values and self-perception

(Hayes et al., 2020), which culminated in a life without success and memories. These problems, summed together, might have created Dahmer's predisposition to enter relationships of the same nature (similar) in other relationships and environments and to maintain them, both due to their excessive emotional tolerance to the aversiveness present in them, as well as the way they respond to the aggressive actions of others.

The most important aspect we can observe during the dialogues between Dahmer and his relatives is the lack of vulnerability. Whenever Dahmer tried to talk about his feelings, his relatives did not pay attention, changed the subject, or punished him. However, when he behaved inappropriately, he got the attention of his family and colleagues. Several pairings also occurred during his life, conditioning inappropriate behaviors. Among these interactions and pairings, his behavior has no abnormal causes. We can only observe a series of poor relationships in which there was no room to be authentic and to talk about feelings. Singly, all of these interactions and pairings are normal contingencies. However, when added together, these contingencies were probably responsible for creating and maintaining Dahmer's abnormal behaviors.

Looking for the contingencies of life is a way to search for order among the apparently disordered things (Sidman, 1960). This could help us to understand what contingencies can produce abnormal behaviors and what we can do to prevent poor relationships and quality of life. As presented in this article, Dahmer's life shows how social connectedness matters and highlights how the FAP principles are important as psychotherapy and a way of life. Several other aspects of Dahmer's dialogues and life can be (and must be) analyzed to understand his behavior. This article represents only one type of analysis and, of course, represents the choices of its authors.

The difficulty in maintaining relationships, however, cannot be considered as the only cause for Dahmer's behaviors. Several other aspects can contribute to what Dahmer did. As stated by Hare and Neumann (2008), the structure of psychopathy involves interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial characteristics. There are two main approaches to examine each one of these characteristics (Hare, 1999): the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of



Mental Disorders (DSM), with a focus on antisocial personality disorder, and the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised. Thus, psychopathy (and, of course, Dahmer's behavior) has multi-level causes (Blair et al., 2006) involving molecular, neural, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. Therefore, different sciences or disciplines must be considered to establish the causes of Dahmer's behaviors. As radical behaviorists, we look for the contingencies and work on the behavioral level. Other researchers can look for different contingencies and develop new interpretations. As a suggestion, we recommend that the readers of this article and future researchers interested in this theme watch documentaries about Dahmer's life. It could contribute to more reliable data about his life.

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