

CASE REPORT

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Victim Selection in the Jeffrey Dahmer Slayings: An Example of Repetition in the Paraphilias?

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ABSTRACT: It has been suggested that Jeffrey Dahmer, who was convicted for the serial murders of 15 people, carefully selected most of his victims on the basis of their external phenotype. Although the sample size is small, both univariate and multivariate methods support the possibility that similarity in craniofacial architecture strongly influenced his choice of victims. Because necrophilia played a key role during expert testimony at his trial, and because Dahmer retained most of the skulls and one postcranial skeleton, the results suggest that his actions represent an example of repetition in the paraphilias.

KEYWORDS: forensic anthropology, craniometry, paraphilia, serial murders, psychiatry

On July 22, 1991, 31-year-old Jeffrey Dahmer was arrested in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, shortly after a man with a handcuff dangling from his left wrist had escaped from Dahmer's apartment. The man approached two nearby police officers who were at first skeptical about his story, but they eventually agreed to accompany him back to the apartment where polaroid photographs of freshly dismembered males, human skulls and a complete skeleton suspended from a shower spigot were found in a dresser drawer. A complete human head was later discovered in the refrigerator, and further search revealed decomposing body parts in a 57-gallon barrel, four skulls with intact soft tissue, seven meticulously boiled and cleaned skulls and one similarly cleaned postcranial skeleton. Three of the cleaned skulls had been painted with a mottled black and silver spray paint, apparently to be included with others as part of a shrine that Dahmer intended to build, and three other cleaned skulls had two or three approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ " diameter holes drilled in the vicinity of bregma. These were subsequently shown to be crude attempts to lobotomize some of his victims by injecting muriatic acid into their brains.

Over the next several months, and culminating in his sanity trial that began in January, 1992, Dahmer received worldwide attention as one of the more notorious serial murderers in U.S. history. After pleading guilty to 15 of 17 murders, the first committed in Ohio at age 18, and having been found not insane, Dahmer was sentenced to 957 years in prison. Details of the case from the initial arrest to the final sentencing can be found in

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the account by A. E. Schwartz [1], a *Milwaukee Journal* crime reporter who closely followed the case.

On July 24, Dr. Jeffrey Jentzen, Milwaukee Co. Medical Examiner, requested my assistance in establishing identities of the victims. Upon arrival in Milwaukee the next day, I was asked to examine seven defleshed and cleaned skulls, three of which had been spray painted, one complete postcranial skeleton that belonged to one of the painted skulls, and two partially dismembered bodies of adult black males (evident from skin color and facial morphology). Based on standard morphological observations for sex determination [2], all seven skulls were from males, and discriminant function analysis indicated that all but one were blacks. The single exception had morphological facial features suggesting southeast Asian extraction and was later identified as the skull of a 14-year-old Laotian boy. Dr. L. Thomas Johnson, forensic odontologist at the Marquette University School of Dentistry, established positive identifications of these nine individuals through examinations of dental records.

During the autopsy examinations, I noted a remarkable similarity in observable features and metric dimensions of the six black skulls. When the trial was completed, two comments by individuals close to the case provided additional stimuli for this investigation. The first, by Gerald Boyle, Dahmer's defense attorney [3] was that "He didn't hate his homosexuality; he just didn't understand it, and the black men just happened to fit the body type that he fantasized about" (my italics). The second [1] was that "he was always the aggressor with the men he met, usually very pretty men, almost boyish, willowy, and effeminate. . . . Dahmer was a loner who spoke to no one until he spotted someone he wanted" (my italics). The main objective of this investigation, therefore, is to determine if there is a craniometric basis for these two opinions, which suggest that craniofacial morphology may have been a principal factor in Dahmer's selection of victims. If so, repetition in victim selection could be another of Dahmer's many deviant personality characteristics as described by Boyle during the trial [1].

Methods

The most obvious limitation on this study is the small sample size ($n = 6$), although the sample is unique by almost any standards. Notably, these six (and four other victims whose remains were not retained by Dahmer), were adult, male, black homosexuals with an average age of 24.2 years ($s = 5.03$). Although I was given only the case number of the six individuals and do not know their precise ages, their adult status is confirmed by inclusion in the age range of the ten individuals: 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 24, 28, 31, and 33 years, respectively. Even if there was a reference population of American, black, male homosexuals, which to my knowledge does not exist, comparisons of so small a sample by statistical significance tests in order to assess homogeneity would probably be meaningless. Consequently, the two questions addressed are (1) is there any *indication* that Dahmer's victims were similar in craniofacial morphology, and (2) is there any *indication* that they were gracile in appearance?

Standard sliding and spreading calipers were used to take a series of seven cranial measurements (to the nearest 0.5 mm) on each skull, including glabella-occipital length (GOL), maximum width (MW), basion-bregma height (BBH), basion-nasion (BN), bi-zygomatic diameter (BZD), prosthion-nasion (PN) and basion-prosthion (BP), the definitions of which are given in Giles and Elliot [4]. Because the postcranial remains of all but one of the six individuals were discarded by Dahmer and have not been found, stature (STAT) could not be estimated directly from long bone lengths. However, these data were subsequently provided by Dr. Jentzen for all ten black individuals.

To explore sample variability relative to the first question, I calculated means, standard deviations, coefficients of variation and 95% confidence limits for each of the eight

measurements. A series of six cranial indices was also derived only for visual comparison, using GOL as the common measurement standard. The second question was more difficult to answer because assessments of masculinity and femininity tend to highly subjective. However, if these individuals did appear to be rather gracile, it might be supposed that they would be misclassified as females by discriminant function analysis. Two different functions amenable to the measurement set were used. The first was No. 20 in Giles and Elliot [4], which was developed from crania of individuals in the Terry collection, most of whom were born before 1900. This function is associated with a predictive accuracy of 85%. The second, with a predictive accuracy of 89%, was a "customized" function provided by R. L. Jantz [5] and developed from contemporary American male cranial measurements stored in the Forensic Data Bank at the University of Tennessee. This function was used because criteria for sex attribution based on the older anatomical collections may be less reliable than those based on modern forensic cases [6].

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics, in addition to coefficients of variation and confidence limits, are given in Table 1. To the extent that a coefficient of variation provides a good measure of dispersion and/or variability, and that values of about five or six are "good average values" [7], it appears that this sample is homogeneous, with the exception of the variables involving prosthion (PN and BP). The narrow confidence limits, especially for all variables except GOL and PN, and the close correspondences among the cranial indices in Table 2, also suggest relatively low variability. Inspection of these values shows that only individual No. 4 is an obvious outlier (for the first four indices), probably because his GOL was shorter (176 mm) than those for the other five and the only one below the lower confidence limit (Table 1). Compared to nonrelated groups, the coefficients of

TABLE 1—Descriptive statistics for seven cranial measurements (n = 6) and stature (n = 10).^a

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	C.V.	95% Conf. Limits	
				L ₁	L ₂
GOL	185.17	7.31	3.95	177.50	192.84
MW	131.67	1.51	1.15	130.09	133.25
BBH	138.33	2.34	1.69	135.87	140.79
BN	106.33	3.72	3.50	102.43	110.23
BZD	127.33	3.61	2.84	123.54	131.12
PN	75.83	4.31	5.68	71.31	80.35
BP	109.00	4.56	4.18	104.21	113.79
STAT	177.05	6.57	3.71	172.35	181.75

^aAll values are in millimeters except stature (cm.) and the coefficients of variation.

TABLE 2—Cranial indices of six individuals, with glabello-occipital length as the measurement standard.

Individual No.	Indices					
	MW/GOL	BBH/GOL	BN/GOL	BZD/GOL	PN/GOL	BP/GOL
1	72.04	75.27	55.38	67.74	38.71	55.91
2	67.18	69.74	54.36	66.67	41.54	56.41
3	73.60	77.53	58.43	69.10	44.94	60.11
4	75.57	80.68	61.36	75.57	40.91	60.23
5	70.81	74.59	56.22	68.65	38.92	59.46
6	68.06	71.20	59.16	65.45	40.84	61.26

variation for measurements in this sample are all lower (except GOL) than those for the pooled core populations in Howells [8]. Even more pertinent is the comparison between the standard deviations and coefficients of variation in Table 1 to those in Table 3, which represent values from contemporary cases in the Forensic Data Bank [6]. For all measurements except GOL, both standard deviations and coefficients of variation in Table 1 are substantially lower, again suggesting sample homogeneity. Finally, although unrelated to homogeneity, average stature is virtually the same as that of modern U.S. Black males [9] in the same age group after deducting 1 cm, in accordance with Giles and Hutchinson's [10] finding that reported statures exceed measured statures by about that much.

It could be argued that these findings indicate only that this sample is too small to provide an adequate assessment of actual variability. However, these data also suggest quite strongly that Dahmer selected his victims at least partially on the basis of similarity in craniofacial features.

The question of gracility is more difficult to interpret due to differences in the results of the two discriminant function analyses. The total discriminant scores produced by the Giles-Elliott function, given in Fig. 1, would seem to provide additional support for the proposition that there was repetition in victim selection. Of the six individuals, only No. 2 classified as a male with a posterior probability > 95%, probably because of the higher values for GOL and PN (both above the upper confidence limit). Two others classified only marginally as males, with total scores between the sectioning point and the male mean; the remaining three classified as females between the sectioning point and the female mean. A 50% misclassification rate (and nearly an 83% rate!) for the Giles-Elliott method would be quite unusual [11], and indicates that this was a highly select group of

TABLE 3—Descriptive statistics for seven cranial measurements from the Forensic Data Bank at the University of Tennessee [6].

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	C.V.
GOL	45	186.07	6.13	3.29
MW	46	138.52	5.99	4.32
BBH	46	136.93	6.46	4.72
BN	44	104.14	5.42	5.20
BZD	44	131.80	6.68	5.07
PN	43	71.65	5.34	7.45
BP	42	102.98	5.82	5.65

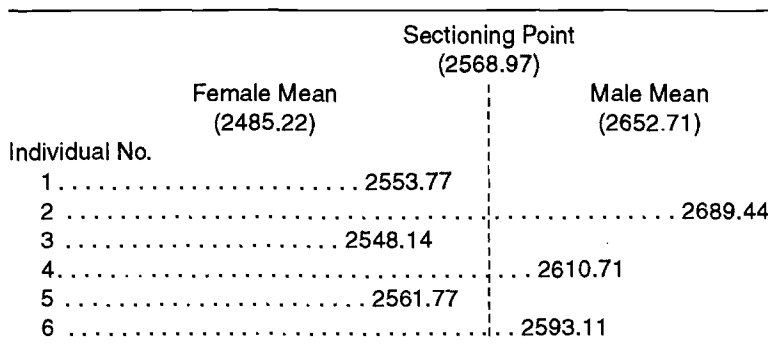


FIG. 1—Total discriminant function scores and sectioning point for function no. 20 in Giles and Elliott [4].

Individual No.	Sectioning Point	
	Female Mean (-3.011)	Male Mean (3.011)
1.....		1.596
2.....		5.933
3.....		0.297
4.....		3.322
5.....		1.406
6.....		2.440

FIG. 2—Total discriminant function scores and sectioning point for *FORDISC 1.0* discriminant function [5].

males. However, the function developed from the Forensic Data Bank at the University of Tennessee classified all six individuals as males (Fig. 2), but only two total scores were above the male mean with posterior probabilities > 95%. The other four scores were between the mean and sectioning point, one of these (No. 3) being very close to the point. The differences between these two analyses probably reflect the growing consensus that contemporary Americans, perhaps due to secular change, are less robust than individuals included in the earlier anatomical collections. If so, the Giles and Elliot sex functions would tend to misclassify gracile males as females, which appears to have occurred in this case. On this basis, then, it may still be maintained that at least four of the six males had gracile craniofacial features. In conjunction with the indications of group homogeneity, therefore, there appears to be craniometric support for the assumption that morphological similarity was one of the criteria used by Jeffrey Dahmer when selecting his victims.

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