



Romanticizing a monster: Commentary

How true crime documentaries have glorified killers Instead of honoring the victims

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Content Warning: Mention of murder, sexual assault, and other gruesome details.

From Zodiac to Ted Bundy, serial killers have been getting documentaries dedicated to them and the crimes they've committed for years, and we as a society love that. We're intrigued by the minds of these killers and can often become obsessed with their awful acts.

One of the latest additions to the ever-long list of notorious killers that take up space in our minds is Jeffrey Dahmer, the man who murdered and dismembered men and boys from 1978 to 1991.

Released this year, the Netflix original series "Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story" has gained a lot of attention. Though this is not the first documentary dedicated to the killer—there have been at least seven others—this newest one along with the 2017 film "My Friend Dahmer" have become popular for more than just the audience's interest in the killer. People think he's hot.

Now, it's not a new concept for killers to have groupies. It happened with Richard Ramirez, a killer who beat, sexually assaulted, and murdered most of his victims from 1984 to 1985. During his trial he had a large following of primarily women, most claiming that they found him attractive. With these two documentaries about Dahmer, many people who have watched them seem to now be following down a very similar path.

This isn't because people found the real Dahmer hot, but instead due to the fact that viewers have found the people who portrayed Dahmer, Evan Peters in "Monster" and Ross Lynch in "My Friend Dahmer," to be very attractive. This was also seen in the Ted Bundy film on Netflix "Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile" when Zac Efron played Bundy.

While finding an actor or celebrity attractive isn't the problem, it's when this attraction turns into obsessing over the killer they are portraying that the action becomes problematic. When intrigue turns into obsession, the killers gain an entirely new opportunity to harm the families of the victims, long after they are gone.

It's also important to remember when watching any true crime documentary that it isn't just something you're viewing safely from behind a TV screen. They're about real events that happened to real people, and changed a countless number of lives forever. This is a fact that has become more apparent not just with the release of the new Dahmer documentaries but also as the demand for True Crime content continues to grow.

Ultimately, the biggest problem that lies with series like "Monster" is that they often don't keep the families of the victims in mind. Upon release of the 2022 Dahmer documentary many complaints were brought up

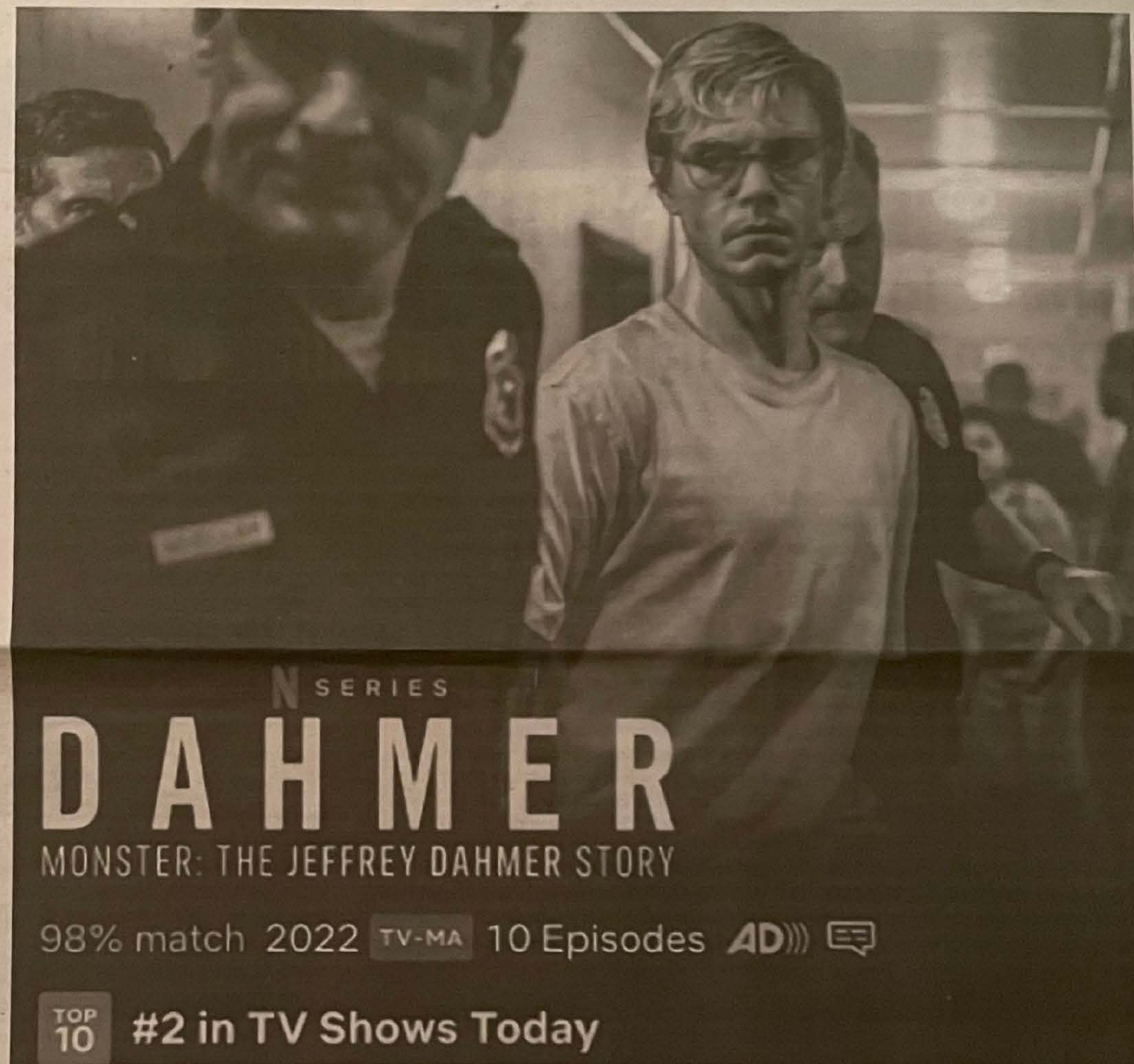


Photo by Eliana Megargee

by the families of the victims on how it was all overly dramatized and how it dredged up a lot of trauma that had been put in the past.

When it came to the release of Netflix's "Monster," the families of Dahmer's victims also claimed that they weren't approached when it came to the series. Now if this is the case, Netflix crossed a line that should never be crossed under any circumstances.

When it comes to the families of the victims, whose lives have been cut short by killers like Dahmer, Bundy, or Ramirez, it's important to remember that they are as much a part of the story as anyone else who was affected. They're the ones who have to live with the fact that someone they loved was taken away from them. They are the ones who have to deal with past trauma that true crime documentaries continuously dredge back up.

I'm not saying that everyone should stop watching true crime documentaries altogether or that every true crime series is bad. I tend to

frequently watch them, and with how popular they have gotten the past couple years, I doubt that the idea of getting rid of them altogether would be possible. But it is important to keep in mind that what you are watching isn't just something that was put on your TV screen for your enjoyment.

Every true crime series or movie you watch is based off of a real event that happened to real people. The deaths portrayed in those films aren't just actors doing their jobs, they are based on events that caused grief. It doesn't matter how it's dressed up, whether that's with gorgeous actors or amazing production value, it won't change that fact.

That's another one of the major problems with idolizing murderers and criminals. Due to all the flash and special effects put into these true crime series, people may not try to idolize the killer when watching them, but can still get caught doing it subconsciously. Idolizing a villain doesn't just mean thinking

of them or forgiving their actions. It's in the way their name comes up more and more in conversations and the news while the people whose lives they took away remain forgotten, and void to the story.

It took 13 years for the police to catch Dahmer. In that time he was able to kill 17 men and boys ranging from ages 14 to 28. That's 17 people who will never get to live out their lives, 17 families that will forever be changed, and 17 important stories that shouldn't be remembered for the killer that was behind them, but for the lives that were lost. And that's just the case for one of these killers, each one is different leaving an entirely new trail of victims in their wake.

So next time you go on Netflix or Hulu or wherever you go to watch True Crime, try and remember that it's the victims that we should be honoring, not the killer.