

## True Crime Documentaries: Are They Harmful?

BY DAVINA BELLINGER

**ONE OF THE MOST** watched genres is true crime documentaries. They involve true stories about terrible situations. I watch true crime documentaries because it provides outstanding forensic evidence evaluations. I also find shows like “Conversations with a Serial Killer” on Netflix interesting because it gives the audience a primary source to understand the minds of these killers and why they committed their crimes. Some of the true crime shows that tend to be popular are the ones that reenact the serial killer’s point of view, such as Zach Efron as Ted Bundy in “Extremely Wicked Shockingly Evil and Vile” and the newer limited TV series “Dahmer” with Evan Peters portraying Jeffery Dahmer. A reason for these adaptations could be following modern trends and how we portray these serial killers; oftentimes serial killers like the real Ted Bundy were attractive young men. So, having an actor who fits the profile in our time

makes people want to pay attention to the story.

For young audience members, I would say research and understand the true story before diving into the reenactments of these real-life serial killers. The reenactments can help the viewer visualize what happened when these killers committed their murders. A lot of the time, young viewers watch these types of shows and movies because of trends and how famous actors portray their characters. Older audiences understand the picture that Hollywood tries to paint and the psychological aspects that these killers are processing, but may not have fully understood the motives or feelings of these murderers.

An example is a scene from the TV series “Dahmer.” Without big spoilers, Jeffery talks to investigators about his reason for killing his victims and how he does it. He goes on to share that he drank a couple of beers to help ease into his killings so that he would

not remember. The show goes into some graphic details, which I expected because I already knew about the atrocities of the Dahmer story, but there are also some moments where I had to look away. Dahmer was known as a cannibal, and eating people can be unsettling to some viewers. In general, make sure you are researching and understanding what you are watching to know when to censor.

Overall true crime documentaries are not harmful unless the audience completely sympathizes with these criminals. There are more shows to watch that are not reenactments which are good to watch, such as confession tapes, TV series and Forensic Files. These can help audiences know what practitioners within the criminal justice system have used to catch their suspects.



Photo Credit: Joel Veld