

## Chapter 3.7 Theory of Why Dahmer Acted as He Did

In this chapter I relate my theory of why Dahmer alternated from being cruel and sadistic to acting as if he wanted to be loved.

Each of us desires to make sense of the world in which we live. We want to know what to expect so we can plan how to cope with difficulties; we like to feel that we can predict what will happen.

If Dahmer had always been cruel, selfish, sadistic, and controlling, it might have been easier for Billy to know what to expect. Some of the time he presented himself to others as Billy's protector, mentor, and friend. Dahmer read extensively and often taught Billy about anatomy and physiology. He spent hours drilling Billy particularly about bones and their names, and he seemed concerned with teaching him.

What was most confusing was the switch from being extremely cruel to being loving. There were times when Billy woke up from a drugged sleep tied up with ropes. At that point, Dahmer might pet him as he would a woman, telling Billy he loved him, or asking Billy if he loved him. Then suddenly Dahmer would change and beat him with an iron bar across the bones, particularly the shins, knees, ankles, and head. Several times he anally raped him. On other occasions he might beat him first and then pet him while saying that he loved him. For the first few months that I saw Billy, he asked me repeatedly for an explanation of why Dahmer acted this way.

Ordinarily I don't like to interpret someone's behavior, since this is speculation. I like to answer "how" questions. How do you create certain feelings or behavior and how can you change them? "Why" questions are often not very profitable. For instance:

Q: Why does she get so angry when I am only trying to help her?

A: Because she feels you are trying to control her.

Q: Well, why does she resent me trying to control her?

A: Because her father was a control freak.

Q: Then why was her father such a control freak? And why doesn't her sister have the same problem she does?

This type of questioning leads to an endless regression. However, Billy seemed to need an answer for his "why" question: "Why did he love me one minute and hit me the next?"

The challenge was to come up with an explanation that would help Billy make sense out of what had happened to him. In a television interview, Dahmer had talked about how he drugged his victim, killed him, and had sex with the body.

He said this was the only way he could be in complete control. I assumed that having complete control of Billy was very important. The perplexing part is how to explain the radical shift in his behavior. I gave him the best explanation that I could imagine. I postulated that Dahmer had a very intense internal conflict for which he had no solution or resolution. One side of Dahmer felt secure only when he was in complete control. The second side felt secure only when he had assurances that he was loved, respected, and admired. To be in complete control, he needed to drug Billy, tie him up, and beat him. However, the more he acted in this way, the more lonely, isolated, and unloved he felt. Then the second side of him would take over, and he would want assurances that he was loved, respected, and admired. Since he beat Billy to get him to make statements of respect or love, then he could never really feel loved or admired. The more Dahmer tried to “pet” Billy and profess love for him, the more helpless and out of control he felt, and the first side would take over. Neither side was satisfactory, nor stable, so he swung back and forth between them. This created an intense internal conflict within him, which is probably one of the reasons that he stayed drunk much of the time. I speculated that each side of him hated the other side. The side that wanted complete control hated the part of him that wanted to be loved, and the side that wanted to be loved hated the part of him that was controlling and cruel. Billy said that this made sense to him. The explanation seemed to give him some resolution of his confusion. He was familiar with internal conflict within himself, which has been discussed in a previous chapter.

A few months later Billy was still wondering about Dahmer’s change from beating him one minute and then petting him and saying that he loved him a few minutes later. When Dahmer was beating him, he knew that the petting and professing of love would follow, and when he was being petted, he knew that the beatings would follow.

He had read Lionel Dahmer’s book, *A Father’s Story*, and he speculated that there must have been other things that happened to Dahmer to result in his behavior. He doubted that Lionel Dahmer had told everything.

Billy talked about how Dahmer could at times seem like a nice guy. He enjoyed teaching Billy, particularly about anatomy and physiology. Billy said that Dahmer got frustrated with him when he couldn’t remember the steps of the Krebs cycle. He taught him to play chess and would carefully explain each move. Billy says that he has blocked out all his experience with chess and now has no idea how to play. Dahmer had a large chart on the wall showing the bones and muscles of the body. When Billy took courses in college to be certified as an emergency medical technician, he said that he already knew most of the material from what Dahmer had taught him. During the teaching sessions, Dahmer was in control and demanded Billy’s total attention. Billy learned that if he was a good student, Dahmer was pleased, and he was less likely to be beaten.

Billy said that Dahmer would pet him and masturbate at the same time. He

asked for an explanation. I speculated that Dahmer had intense internal conflicts as described above and that he sexualized this tension. He masturbated to relieve this tension, but the relief was partial and temporary.

Billy thought that Dahmer wanted to control his sexuality and prevent him from performing sexually. Billy thinks that is why Dahmer operated on his prostate gland. While Billy was drugged, Dahmer cut into his prostate and evidently removed some tissue. Billy said that he must have used sterile technique because he didn't get infected. This wound slowly healed. He said that between his testicles and anus, there is some thin skin over a depression in his perineum in the area of the prostate. Although he has been reluctant to tell his primary care physician about this, he did ask me to include it in my writing.

At times of crisis and stress, children often form beliefs that play a major factor in shaping their lives. I speculated with Billy about what beliefs Dahmer might have made. At age 6, he had had a hernia operation, and his father Lionel (see References) reported that he had a lot of pain afterwards and even asked if his penis had been cut off. Could Dahmer have formed the belief that you can't trust anyone to protect you and the only way you can be safe is to be in complete control and be the one who gives pain to others?

My goal in giving Billy some possible answers was for him to spend less of his time thinking about Dahmer.