



E39 Investigating a Serial Killer: Jeffrey Dahmer, 20 Years Later

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the specific roles of forensic pathologists, investigators, and criminalists investigating serial killers.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing jurists and investigators on the contributions of forensic pathologists, investigators, law enforcement, and criminalists in the documentation, evaluation, and case preparation of a serial killer. By analyzing the the investigation of the Jeffrey Dahmer case, participants will experience the step-by-step sequence of scene, autopsy, and interview techniques, as well as the necessary collaborative environment and interactions required in a high profile death investigation.

On July 23, 1991, personnel from the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner Office and Milwaukee Police Department responded to an apartment where partially skeletonized remains of eleven individuals had been detected. Law enforcement had initiated the investigation of the premises after responding to a naked man, who while handcuffed, was running down a city street. The assailant, Jeffrey Dahmer, was quickly taken into custody. In this unique situation, Dahmer freely discussed his role in the killings with investigators and provided a valuable resource for the collaboration of the scene and autopsy findings to pathologists and law enforcement personal during the investigation. Medical examiner personnel recovered seven human skulls, three of which were painted; four human heads, and one postcranial skeleton from a portable freezer; and three skeletonized bodies from a 55-gallon plastic storage drum. The partially dissected bodies, skulls, and numerous photographic journals were transported to the medical examiner's office. Scene investigation, anthropological analysis, and autopsy details of the bodies provided prosecutors with valuable evidence of the methods of death, motives of the killer, and psychological state of Dahmer during the course of a death spree that lasted nine months.

The evaluation of the scene allowed investigators to establish methods, motives of death, begin the preliminary identification process, and to demonstrate the mental capacity of the assailant. Forensic pathologists assisted with the identification, established the cause of death, and documented injuries that allowed investigators to question Dahmer on various injuries he inflicted upon victims. Of the eleven victims recovered from the scene, all were identified on the basis of antemortem dental comparison by a forensic odontologist. The skeletons were easily identified due to characteristic dissection levels of the spine and extremities. Fingerprints were recovered from four victims. The anthropological and odontological examination assisted with the identification and also resulted in the establishment of victim profiles. Dahmer was diagnosed as having a mixed personality disorder with sadistic, obsessive, fetishistic, antisocial, necrophilic features typical of what has been described as organized, nonsocial, lust murderer.

This presentation will discuss investigation of the Jeffrey Dahmer Case from scene to the courtroom. It will discuss the physical and pathological evidence used to convict Jeffrey Dahmer. It will also discuss the pitfalls in the investigative process using the lessons learned in the Dahmer case.

Serial Killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, High-Profile Case