

Politeness Strategies In Media Interrogation: Analyzing The Interviewer's Role In The Jeffrey Dahmer Interview

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Abstract: *Media interviews shape public perception, especially in criminal cases. This study analyzes the politeness strategies the interviewer employed in the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as applied to 1987. The qualitative discourse analysis established how the interviewer utilized bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies to confront face-threatening acts, control conversation patterns, and play with audience perception. It has been established that courtesy strategies can strike a balance between neutrality and insistence; this enables the interviewer to extract information while keeping his or her professionalism intact. Apart from that, sociological factors- power, social distance, and rank of imposition - dictate how the interviewer approaches a situation. This research confirms that an interviewer plays a very important role in framing media narratives while simultaneously reinforcing the impact of linguistic choices in journalistic discourse. All these studies say strategic politeness is important in interviews with controversial figures for media discourse analysis, forensic linguistics, and journalism ethics.*

Keywords: Politeness strategies, media discourse, face-threatening acts, Jeffrey Dahmer interview, journalistic neutrality, discourse control

1.0 Introduction

Media represents the primary perspective through which the public views crime, justice, and morality in this digitally driven era. For a long time, sensational interviews, particularly those with criminals, have fascinated people and offered them a rare glimpse into the minds of extraordinary individuals who have committed remarkable acts of violence (Sedorkin, 2020). Sensationalism is only one aspect; these interviews open up significant questions concerning journalistic ethics, the construction of public discourse, and power relations between an interviewer and interviewee (Arbaoui et al., 2020). While much attention is justifiably paid to the interviewee-their words, body language, and strategies, the role of the interviewer is important to consider as well (Ma et al., 2021). The formulation of questions by a journalist as well as grant or restriction to narrative control and use of linguistic strategies can significantly shape public perception regarding both the subject and content of discourse.

Interviews with serial killers are undeniably controversial, bearing unique ethical and linguistic challenges. Unlike traditional news interviews, these must be carefully negotiated within the parameters of objectivity and confrontation. Serial killers are notoriously manipulative and show little remorse; thus, interviewers have a difficult task extracting information from such subjects without appearing to sympathize or be overly compliant with them (Marsh & Melville, 2019). Politeness strategies become crucial in this balancing act because the interviewer has to make decisions about when to confront the

subject directly, when to take a more passive approach, and how to guide the audience's understanding through subtle linguistic choices (Guo & Ren, 2020). Choices made in these regards are not simply stylistic but rather tactical in that they determine the story that comes forth from the dialogue.

One of the most interviewed criminal cases is that of Jeffrey Dahmer, whose crimes are among the most horrific in contemporary history. The post-arrest interview with him offers a striking illustration of how an interviewer manages interactional control when dealing with a notoriously compliant yet eerily apathetic respondent. While much analysis has focused on Dahmer's strategic self-presentation, language choice, and psychological framing, much less has been devoted to the strategies employed by the interviewer. The interviewers for Jeffrey Dahmer could not have been a more appropriate set (Packard & Berger, 2021). They negotiated a very complex territory confessing without sensationalism, and professionalism while not appearing unempathetic, guiding talk without terminating significant dialogue.

This study shifts the focus from Dahmer to the interviewer and analyzes the politeness strategies employed to manage the conversation. Applying Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory of 1987, this research explores positive and negative politeness by the interviewer, how he/she mitigates or intensifies FTAs, and how he/she frames questions to maintain authority. Whereas in traditional criminal interrogations power dynamics favor law enforcement, media interviews require a sophistication in approach to politeness and control. An examination of the linguistic strategies deployed in this interview will thus reveal much about the larger role journalists play in framing narratives about crime and morality.

1.2 Statement of Purpose

Media interviews are very important in shaping public perception, especially regarding the coverage of notorious criminals. Interviewers face ethical dilemmas when they have to professionally and strategically guide the conversation, control, while extracting information. Politeness strategies assist in establishing power dynamics, reducing confrontation, and conveying subtle impressions to the audience. This study explores Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as applied to the strategies of politeness used by the interviewer in the Jeffrey Dahmer interview. The analysis of linguistic choices that construct discourse while upholding neutrality and a balance between assertiveness highlights the role played by interviewers in shaping narratives, influencing public perception, and reinforcing journalistic responsibility through high-stakes crime reporting.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the politeness strategies that the interviewer uses to shape the tone of the interview and affect the audience's perception of Jeffrey Dahmer's character.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the interviewer's use of politeness strategies shape the interview's tone and contribute to framing Jeffrey Dahmer's public image?

1.5 Delimitation

This study only applies to the strategies of politeness used by the interviewer in the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer. It does not touch on Dahmer's lexical choices, psychological motivations, or media representations of his crimes. The analysis is based exclusively on the discourse strategies employed by the interviewer, which include politeness face-threatening acts, and the framing of questions using Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory 1987. Furthermore, it is a case study of one interview and not a comparative study of several media interactions.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study sheds some light on the use of politeness strategies by interviewers in controlling discourse

during high-stakes criminal interviews. Making use of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, as applied to the linguistic choices of the interviewer in the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer, this study brings about the interplay between journalists in shaping narratives and influencing audience perception. It therefore adds to media discourse analysis, forensic linguistics, and journalism ethics by showing that strategic language use does shift power dynamics while molding public perception. Important implications are given to media practitioners, researchers, and students of discourse analysis regarding journalists' ethical responsibilities when dealing with controversial subjects.

2.0 Literature Review

Many studies have explored the use of politeness strategies in political interviews, broadcast journalism, and online communication, highlighting how journalists manage to express neutrality while being assertive.

Janicka (2020) applies politeness strategies in political interviews to show how journalists and politicians use positive and negative politeness to control discourse and attract their audience. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, this study finds that politicians prefer positive politeness to establish cooperation while journalists strategically employ negative politeness to avoid coercing responses. This is in line with the present study's focus on how interviewers shape discourse through politeness strategies. While political journalists balance assertiveness with neutrality, the interviewer of the Jeffrey Dahmer interview employs polite strategies to manage interaction, minimize face-threatening acts, and manipulate audience perception.

Purwitarini (2020), interviews are video recordings that require the application of politeness strategies by interviewers and interviewees through positive and negative politeness. According to Brown and Levinson's (1978) model, differences in media platforms as well as cultural contexts create an influence on strategies for politeness. Results prove that the interviewers strategically manage politeness to control interaction and guide audience perception, which is relevant to the present study of focusing on the role of the interviewer in the Jeffrey Dahmer interview. Politeness strategies shape media narratives and reinforce power dynamics in high-stakes interviews, so they must be noticed. This study affirms linguistic choices' importance within media discourse.

Facchinetti (2024) talks about the transformation of broadcast interviews and how journalists consciously act in maneuvering talk through call techniques and politeness strategies. The researchers note that interviewers in both face-to-face and video-mediated interactions impose professional decorum while being actively engaged, often directing the audience's perception through adversarial questioning paired with evaluative language. It accords with the present study regarding employing politeness strategies to manage discourse and control in the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer. Interviewer strategies indicate that journalists shape public narratives while exhibiting shifting boundaries between impartial reporting and involvement within spectacular criminal storytelling.

Oyadiji (2020) applies politeness strategies to the analysis of Nigerian news-based online communities, where the strategies are found to be essential in keeping discourse alive and shaping interaction patterns. Through the lenses of facework and relational work, this study brings out the relevance of politeness in a socio-political conversation within digital news environments. Much indeed is made of virtual interactions; this research highlights the impact of politeness on media discourse at large, which is congruent with an investigation into how interviewers manage politeness in high-stakes conversations. Just as online communities employ rules of politeness to manage discourse, interviewers deploy politeness strategies to set the terms for interaction, face-threatening acts mitigation, and audience manipulation in interviews like that with Jeffrey Dahmer.

While much scholarship has been devoted to analyzing politeness strategies in political discourses and media interviews, very little has been said about interviewers in high-profile criminal interviews. Most of the existing literature focuses on the language of the interviewee, ignoring the role that interviewers

play in constructing narratives. This study fills this gap by exploring the politeness strategies employed by the interviewer in the Jeffrey Dahmer interview to negotiate discourse control, face-threatening act mitigation, and audience impact.

3.0 Methodology

The research focuses on the politeness strategies used by the interviewer in the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer, applying Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to consider sociological factors in determining discourse control, face-threatening acts, and power relations.

3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive approach to determine the politeness strategy used in media discourse. Using Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987), this study categorizes strategies of politeness, face management techniques, and sociological variables giving an insight into how the interviewer in the Jeffrey Dahmer interview regulates discourse, mitigates face-threatening acts, and controls audience perception.

3.2 Data Collection

The study uses the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer as the primary data source, analyzing recorded and transcribed material. It identifies key interactions facilitated by the interviewer, focusing on politeness strategies, FTAs, and discourse control. The transcript was segmented for contextualized analytical work regarding journalistic norms versus audience expectations.

3.3 Data Analysis

The interviewer's conversation was analyzed to determine politeness strategies, face-threatening acts (FTAs), and discourse control. Directness, mitigation, and strategic questioning were classified without bias in their contribution to the management of interaction. The factors, namely power relations, social distance, and level of imposition, have been considered in the choice of language made by the interviewer as well as the tone of the interview.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, which governs how people manage their social interactions while preserving "face." The following key concepts were applied in this study:

3.4.1 Positive and Negative Face

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a positive face is related to the person's wish to be liked, appreciated, and approved by others while a negative face is an individual's wish for autonomy and not to be imposed upon.

3.4.2 Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Speech acts targeting either positive or negative faces, including confrontations, accusations, or intrusive questions. The journalist's professionalism lies in managing FTAs strategically to assertively balance them with the essence of journalism.

3.4.3 Politeness Strategies

The study classifies the linguistic choices of the interviewer into four strategies of politeness: Bald-on-Record, which applies to questions that are direct and explicit; Positive Politeness, which helps create a rapport as well as soften inquiries; Negative Politeness, which minimizes imposition while still respecting the interviewee; and Off-Record Politeness, through which indirect language is employed to elicit expansive answers. All these strategies assist the interviewer in navigating discourse while managing FTAs and controlling interaction.

3.4.4 Sociological Variables

The interviewers' politeness strategies were influenced by three significant factors, namely power, social distance, and imposition rank. Power determines the interviewer's authority, which shapes the choice between direct or mitigated forms of address; social distance affects the level of politeness required; and imposition rank dictates the framing of sensitivity in question. A focus on these factors reveals the strategy used by the interviewer to construct talk in the interview with Jeffrey Dahmer.

4.0 Analysis

This study examines the linguistic choices made by the interviewer in the televised interview with Jeffrey Dahmer (Inside Edition, 2018). The main focus will be on how the interviewer will make use of different politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987) to have a peaceful and informative conversation with Jeffrey Dahmer.

4.1 Positive Face

The interviewer uses positive politeness strategies to establish an open dialogue with Jeffrey Dahmer, framing questions that acknowledge his ability to reflect on and understand himself. The use of empathetic phrasing and open-ended questions creates a spirit of collaboration while the interviewer retains control over the story. All this helps sidestep confrontational elements while reaffirming Dahmer's positive face, thus inviting him to participate more actively in the conversation.

Interviewer: *"You do sound, though, like the kind of person who could have said to himself, 'This is wrong. I must stop.'"*

The interviewer does admit to Dahmer's ability to introspect and differentiate right from wrong, thus making him understand the weight of his actions. This statement uses a positive face strategy by affirming Dahmer's capacity for self-awareness, and it does so in a way that subtly reinforces the idea that he wishes to be thought of as introspective and reasonable. In doing so, the interviewer establishes a cooperative dynamic, which allows her to induce a more collaborative response from Dahmer while pushing the story toward themes of accountability and human complexity.

Interviewer: *"What was the turning point for you that made you suddenly realize that you had done something wrong—something you should be sorry for?"*

The interviewer uses a positive face strategy by assuming that Dahmer felt remorse; the question is framed in such a way that it acknowledges his ability to reflect and be accountable. This softens the interaction, allowing Dahmer to present himself in a better light. In focusing on having moral awareness, the interviewer thereby makes an implicit request for cooperation and openness which allows Dahmer to deal with the question in a manner that is congruent with social norms relating to introspection and regret.

4.2 Negative Face

The interviewer uses negative politeness strategies to affirm Dahmer's autonomy and allow conversation on sensitive matters. Tentative language, open-ended questions, and non-confrontational wording are employed by the interviewer to minimize imposition and create an atmosphere where Dahmer is not too pressured to articulate his defense. It is precisely these strategies that make the interaction more collaborative; while the difficult topics must be discussed, an avoiding tone of confrontation or judgment is maintained.

Interviewer: *"Do you know what started it? Is there any kind of incident that you can remember?"*

The interviewer's tentative phrasing respects Dahmer's negative face by avoiding a demand for clarification. The phrasing, *"Is there any kind of incident,"* lessens the interrogative's imposition and, therefore, allows Dahmer to retain control over his story. It invites a considered answer while allowing

him discretion as to the level of detail he cares to give, thus keeping the exchange cooperative.

Interviewer: *"Could someone like you be stopped? Could you be helped?"*

The hypothetical question framing by the interviewer protects Dahmer's negative face by not making explicit accusations or demands for particular answers. The exploratory nature of the question minimizes confrontation and allows Dahmer to maintain control over how he engages with the topic. It thus relieves the pressure of the interaction, establishing a more collaborative dynamic in which he feels free to offer his opinions without concerns about being critiqued or constrained.

4.3 Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

The interviewer in Dahmer's televised interview uses face-threatening acts to elicit criticism, demand accountability, and confront Dahmer with the weight of his wrongdoings. These acts often distinguish between outright confrontation and a professional tone to avoid intensifying conflict.

Interviewer: *"Why did you photograph them?"*

This question is a face-threatening act (FTA) because it directly challenges Dahmer's negative face by requiring him to explain an action that is on display in his obsessive and disturbing behavior. In probing his motivations, the interviewer makes it impossible for Dahmer not to speak to an overtly incriminating and grotesque aspect of his crimes. This question undermines any attempt on Dahmer's part to assert some semblance of humanity or rationality, as it brings forth his obsession with preserving his victims in an unnatural and unsettling manner.

Interviewer: *"What were your fantasies about?"*

This is an FTA as it threatens Dahmer's negative and positive face by requiring him to reveal the sinister and taboo aspects of his fantasies. The question invites social judgment and moral scrutiny when asking Dahmer to go into the personally and morally problematic ground. It compels Dahmer to speak thoughts that directly oppose societal expectations of decorum, thus magnifying the audience's perception of his depravity. The question confronts Dahmer with the cognitive foundations of his crimes, contradicting any story that might depict his actions as impulsive or uncontrollably derived.

Interviewer: *"Was there pleasure in that fantasy?"*

This question is an FTA because it explicitly threatens Dahmer's positive face by linking his fantasies to personal gratification. By emphasizing the pleasure-seeking dimension of his thought process, the interviewer compels Dahmer to admit or deny pleasure in his deviance. This directly undermines any attempt he may have had to present himself as reflective or conflicted and frames him instead as self-serving. The question thus invites the audience to perceive Jeffrey Dahmer as someone who knowingly indulged in bad impulses, hence casting moral judgment more deeply on his character and behavior.

Interviewer: *"When the bodies were still in your apartment, there was no time when you would see them and say, 'This is grotesque. What have I done?'"*

Such a question is an FTA because it confronts Dahmer's negative face by demanding he comply with societal expectations of remorse and reflection. The wording compels him to confess his desensitization to the horrific nature of his actions, thereby undermining his control over the discourse. By questioning his ability to feel guilt, the interviewer makes it impossible for Dahmer to speak on his emotional detachment; thus, he cannot introduce himself as humane. This line of questioning serves to solidify the accountability demanded by the audience, making Dahmer portray himself as incapable of acknowledging the ethical repercussions of his actions.

Interviewer: *"Did you like feeling evil?"*

This question is an FTA because it challenges Dahmer's positive face by requiring him to confront his feelings about his malevolence. It forces him to confess or deny satisfaction in being "evil," thus

securing a defensive position. The question negates any tale that Dahmer could construct about his crimes being compulsive expressions only. Rather, it focuses on his emotional relationship to his actions, heightening the moral and social scorn of his character as one who can feel conscious enjoyment of wrongdoing.

Interviewer: *"If you were out on the street now, would you still be committing the crimes?"*

This question is an FTA in that it threatens both the positive and negative faces of Dahmer. It makes him confess that he still poses an ongoing threat to society, thus weakening his self-presentation as someone who has been rehabilitated or reflecting. The assumption of uncontrollable impulses at the hands of the interviewer challenges Dahmer's freedom to act and moral responsibility. It's hypothetical framing ensures deviance at least is assumed to persist, thereby magnifying societal shame. Such a line of questioning renders one irredeemable, thus diminishing any efforts to dispel the public's perception of his threat.

4.4 Politeness Strategies

4.4.1 Bald On-Record

The interviewer employs bald on-record strategies to confront Dahmer and seek accountability, thereby ensuring that the interview engages with tough subjects head-on and unambiguously.

Interviewer: *"Were you almost flaunting it?"*

This question directly confronts Dahmer's behavior, implying his actions were arrogance or defiance. The bald on-record wording leaves no room for Dahmer to reinterpret or downplay his behavior; it forces him to face the perception of his conduct. In employing the term "*flaunting*," the interviewer makes audacity in his crime much more pronounced and challenges any form of passivity or remorse. This approach takes boldness and intent as key traits of his conduct and compels the audience to think about the psychological and ethical ramifications. Such directness secures an unfiltered examination of what goes into making Jeffrey Dahmer a killer.

Interviewer: *"Do you still feel those same urges? Do you still feel that compulsion, that obsession?"*

This question directly challenges Dahmer to admit whether his compulsions persist. By avoiding any mitigating language, the interviewer forces Dahmer to confront the continuity of his deviant urges. This bald on-record strategy emphasizes the ongoing psychological struggles Dahmer faces, pushing him to provide an honest response. The use of "*compulsion*" and "*obsession*" makes it inevitable that he cannot evade answering the seriousness of the question. It will ensure that the audience contemplates the disturbing fact that even now, which would show how his deviance is still relentless and how he might still pose a danger.

4.4.2 Positive Politeness

The interviewer uses Positive Politeness strategies in the delicate, high-stakes interview scenario with Jeffrey Dahmer. By relieving tension, creating intrigue, and keeping a friendly tone, the interviewer enables Dahmer to provide lengthy responses without feeling insulted or judged. These strategies are applied to close the social distance and create a conversational atmosphere in which they can discuss very heavy topics rather comfortably.

Interviewer: *"Ten of your 17 victims were Black. Were they racially motivated?"*

The interviewer employs a simple yet neutral technique to address the potentially racially sensitive aspect of Dahmer's crimes. The question is devoid of any form of confrontational language, thus minimizing aggression and establishing a friendly setting that allows Dahmer to reply without feeling pressured. Unexpectedly, such wording minimizes nearly all the chances of becoming defensive yet ensures that a sensitive subject is raised candidly. Curiosity rather than condemnation is suggested in

the tone, and this provides Positive Politeness by allowing conversation while still maintaining some social distance. A neutral framing of the question eliminates any concern related to Dahmer's identity or self-image while placing priority on clarity and openness rather than dialogue.

Interviewer: *"Do you know what started it? Is there any kind of incident that you can remember?"*

The interviewer frames the question in an open-ended manner, lending Dahmer a bit of latitude in his answer. This respects his right to narrate his experiences in the way he deems best. Moreover, the question is neither leading nor accusatory and hence does not impose much on Dahmer; therefore, a cooperative tone is established. This approach invites Dahmer to think critically and divulge his viewpoints while still keeping the interaction non-aggressive. The interview focuses on discussing the factors that drove Dahmer's behaviors, which is an aspect of Positive Politeness by fostering conversation and minimizing possible discord. The word choices of the interviewer establish a connection and also ensure that Dahmer feels that his opinion is truly being sought, therefore promoting cooperative interaction.

4.4.3 Negative Politeness

In the interview, the interviewer uses negative politeness strategies to cross sensitive, ethical boundaries in talking about the crimes of Jeffrey Dahmer. These strategies were designed to minimize imposition while at the same time respecting his autonomy and creating a conversational atmosphere where people feel free to speak openly. Indeterminate phrasing, indirect questioning, and hypothetical framing techniques allow the interviewer not to heighten confrontation or provoke defensive reactions while discussing seriously sensitive subject matters. This allows an exploration of Dahmer's motivations and actions while maintaining professionalism and respect for a dialogue that is both high-stakes and highly emotive.

Interviewer: *"What happened to you in the nine years in between that you were able to stop, that you were able to control yourself?"*

The question represents negative politeness because the question is carefully worded so as not to infringe upon Dahmer's autonomy or confront him head-on. By asking *"what happened,"* the reporter uses hesitant and non-critical language, which gives Dahmer the space to define and reply on his terms. It does not demand an explanation or lay blame; therefore, it respects Dahmer's negative face. The phrase *"you were able to control yourself"* implies that there was some self-control involved, so any potentially face-threatening behavior is mitigated. Such an indirect form constitutes negative politeness by paying sensitivity heed while keeping a cooperative tone during an interaction with high stakes.

Interviewer: *"What was the purpose of the altar going to be?"*

This quote is a form of negative politeness in that the question uses exploratory and indirect language to approach an extremely sensitive issue while avoiding any imposition in terms of judgment or accusation. Framing the question in terms of intention avoids any confrontation with the grotesque reality of Dahmer's actions, thus still allowing him the respect to define it on his terms. Such a question's tentative and open-ended nature further reduces any face-threatening talk (FTA) in discussing such a disturbing topic. Non-confrontational as it provides space rather than passing judgment or offering direct inquiry into the ethics of Dahmer's intentions, space is provided for him to reveal his thought process. This indirectness in communication is applied as part of negative politeness strategies by focusing on minimizing imposition while enabling informative and cooperative interaction about a pretty tough topic.

4.4.4 Off-Record Politeness Strategies

The interviewer uses off-record strategies to handle the discussion's sensitive, high-stakes aspect by letting Jeffrey Dahmer expand on his points without feeling cornered. Indirect language and open-ended

questions reduce confrontations, promote contemplation, and create a more collaborative atmosphere in the interview.

Interviewer: *"Do you dislike it?"*

The indirect question asked about Dahmer's struggle with his sexuality and was very politely off-record as far as politeness strategies are concerned due to the open-ended and non-confrontational formulation. Since no direct accusation or demand for justification is expressed, the interviewer allows Dahmer to frame the question in his terms, which creates freedom in his response. This indirectness pulls down its face-threatening act (FTA) because it does not directly challenge what he claims to be or do. Instead, it subtly probes his internal conflict and invites him to reflect rather than become defensive. In addition, the simplicity and ambiguity of the phrasing eliminate emotional weight from the question, hence creating an atmosphere of collaboration that may encourage honest discourse while still allowing Dahmer to have some control over how he presents himself.

Interviewer: *"If you were out on the street now, would you still be committing the crimes?"*

The question is an example of off-record politeness and at the same time a face-threatening act (FTA). Its hypothetical nature avoids confrontation, hence allowing Dahmer to interpret and react without feeling overtly accused. This indirectness imposes less, in line with off-record strategies as it shifts the focus to reflection rather than attribution of fault. The ambiguity in *"Would You Still"* leaves room for Dahmer to feel in control of his story. However, the very content of such a question clouds Dahmer's negative face in that it forces him to consider the possibility of further deviance. On top of that, it challenges his positive face by implying that he is still dangerous and unreformed. The dual nature of this thus illustrates the interviewer's careful balance in eliciting honesty while avoiding blatant hostility.

4.5 Sociological Variables

4.5.1 Power (P)

The interviewer uses strategic language to establish control and steer the talk, frequently employing direct questions and hypothetical situations to ensure an honest answer from Jeffrey Dahmer. By constructing questions that challenge Dahmer's perception of himself and require reflection, the interviewer confirms her role as a moral authority while still controlling the development of the story.

Interviewer: *"Do you still feel those same urges? Do you still feel that compulsion, that obsession?"*

In this question, the interviewer directly addresses Jeffrey Dahmer's ongoing compulsions, which allows him to take control of the narrative by confronting the most unsettling aspects of his behavior. The phrase *"Do you still feel"* has been repeated, which makes it an intense inquiry. It brings forth the expectation that Dahmer would be accountable for his actions and also introspective about them. By making the compulsions pointedly persistent and pivotal to his persona, she solidifies her standing as a moral and intellectual authority over him. The choice of emotionally charged words like *"compulsion"* and *"obsession"* only highlights how serious the subject is; it forces Dahmer to deal with the question on an extremely personal level. This frankness admits no possibilities for evasive maneuvers; instead, it positions the interviewer firmly as one who dares to handle tough realities while preserving professional decorum enough to guide dialogue toward deeper psychological insight.

Interviewer: *"What were your fantasies about?"*

The interviewer's question addresses Dahmer's psychological state and demonstrates confidence by taking the dialogue to the sensitive area of his fantasies. Inadvertently, it challenges Dahmer to reveal those private disturbing thoughts that led to his actions; he has to reflect on himself. The open-ended form of the question makes it mandatory to answer in detail rather than just yes or no. Moreover, by asking in neutral language, she can keep a professional tone while also directing the conversation away from him. The word *"fantasies"* has been chosen deliberately; it will show that the interviewer has

competence in investigating deeply what goes on in Dahmer's mind. It will hardly miss out on pointing out the interviewer's authority over what focuses more in this story: moral weight in talking about the subject matter versus extracting useful insight into Dahmer's psychology.

Interviewer: "*Could someone like you be stopped? Could you be helped?*"

Through this hypothetical question, the interviewer asserts her moral authority while inviting Dahmer to reflect on his capacity for change. The expression "*someone like you*" sets apart Dahmer as a particular and extreme case, thus implicitly highlighting the magnitude of his deviation from social norms. By inquiring if he could be "*stopped*" or "*helped*," the interviewer pushes Dahmer to reflect on the limitations of his actions and interventionistic possibilities that could have changed his path. It is by these lines that the interviewee emerges as a representative of society who needs to explore what must be known about human behavior limits and redemption. The hypothetical framing eliminates any outright confrontation; thus, Dahmer can thoughtfully respond while, implicitly, in the fact that he is an extraordinary case needing study and judgment.

4.5.2 Social Distance (D)

The interviewer tactfully maintains a desirable social distance - professional yet sensitive to the context. Open-ended questions, neutral wording, and careful framing create an atmosphere of collaboration while at the same time keeping the dialogue impersonal and non-confrontational.

Interviewer: "*What was the purpose of the altar going to be?*"

The interviewer's tentative wording in this question serves to diffuse any potential implicatory thrust. Inquiring about the "*purpose*" rather than "*function*" of the altar opens up a non-evaluative, non-confrontational frame of reference for discussion and allows Dahmer to talk about his views freely. It closes no social distance, asking Dahmer to elucidate on his thought process without making him feel cornered or defensive. Open-ended language is used here, which is a mark of respect for his autonomy in self-expression and creates a more collaborative tone. At the same time, the question does come straight to the seriousness of the matter, keeping the interviewer professionally objective. The question's emotional charge is diffused, allowing sensitivity to balance with clarity; thus, an atmosphere is created in which harder subjects can be talked about productively.

Interviewer: "*Do you know what started it? Is there any kind of incident that you can remember?*"

Such an open-ended formulation of the question allows Dahmer to reflect on his actions without imposing any preconceived notions or judgment. The phrases "*Do you know*" and "*any kind of incident*" are sufficiently vague to enable him to take control of the narrative, a move that respects his autonomy while also reducing their social distance. Neutral and inquisitive language avoids confrontations and creates an atmosphere of mutual interaction. However, this professional detachment ensures that the interview remains objective and continues to focus on its purpose. Validity in the openness of intent establishes attempts on the part of the interviewer to enter into Dahmer's cognition while not wanting to create any possible defensiveness; a fine balance between insight inquiry and respect for sensitivity.

Interviewer: "*Ten of your 17 victims were Black. Were they racially motivated?*"

While addressing a very sensitive issue, the interviewer uses neutral language to keep the question professional and non-confrontational. By stating the fact that "*Ten of your 17 victims were Black*" before asking it, she sets a neutral framework. The term "*racially motivated*" avoids provocative language to a great extent; hence, the conversation remains civil and to the point. In this way, the approach retains near-absolute certainty by not permitting any escalation involved while framing questions as objective inquiries rather than an accusation. Allowing freedom of expression, the interviewer allows Dahmer's autonomy to be respected while dealing with issues that are very pertinent to society. Guaranteeing the intelligent discussion of highly relevant societal questions while sensitivity in the debate is kept and

engagement is facilitated over cooperation is undoubted with this method.

4.5.3 Imposition Rank (R)

The interviewer uses techniques to lower the imposition level associated with sensitive, emotionally charged topics. Through the use of hypothetical situations, indirect wording, and carefully constructed questions, the interviewer diminishes the confrontational aspect of her inquiries, thus creating an atmosphere in which harder topics can be broached without overwhelming the dialogue or pushing Dahmer away.

Interviewer: *"If you were out on the street now, would you still be committing the crimes?"*

The interviewer uses the hypothetical scenario to speak about the danger receding from Dahmer, thereby avoiding an explicit accusation of him having criminal intentions at present. This framing provides emotions related to the question with far-from-immediate accountability and shifts the obligation of speculation to an alternative reality. The interviewer makes this a conditional question, thereby softening the confrontation related to such a sensitive topic yet still compelling Dahmer to reflect on his desires and their inevitability. The form "hypothetical" slightly uses it as a tool to create space for maneuverability in his answer without being overtly cornered or severely critiquing. In this regard, lesser questions that are responsive to public anxiety over impending crimes are juxtaposed with those inquiries requiring professionalism and avoidance of hostilities that permit further movement within dialogue toward broader psycho-social considerations.

Interviewer: *"When the bodies were still in your apartment, there was no time when you would see them and say, 'This is grotesque. What have I done?'"*

The question uses reflective framing to discuss Dahmer's moral detachment without being aggressive. The interview technique is made to reflect on him subtly by posing the question of whether he ever felt horror or regret about his actions, which overtly does not accuse him of being emotionless. The past tense use and hypothetical reflection soften the imposition, thus giving space to respond thoughtfully. Besides, by asking questions about his internal experience, she ensures that his focus remains on the psych state rather than on the horrific specifics of his crimes. This helps maintain professional decorum even as he discusses a sensitive topic and permits effective conversation about his indifference without exploding the conversation unnecessarily or escalating tension gratuitously.

Interviewer: *"Were you almost flaunting it?"*

The question challenges Dahmer's behavior immediately by asking him if he flaunts his actions. "Flaunting" confronts the interviewer with the notion that he is arrogant or defiant in his practices. The introduction of "almost" in this process softens the accusation more implicitly; it allows Dahmer to speak about his intentions without laying full blame on him. Precision with ambiguity keeps serious questioning while maintaining a professional tone. The interviewer's words make Dahmer think about how he is perceived; it brings to focus the societal consequences of his actions. This technique applies wonderfully to high imposition while still permitting an open dialogue, thus ensuring that conversation remains productive and centered on psychodynamic inquiry.

5.0 Discussion

The interviewer is instrumental in determining the conversation that shapes not only the audience's perception of Dahmer but also the overall discourse regarding that interview. Open-ended questions have been specifically crafted to allow the interviewer to achieve a balance between impartiality and expertise while ensuring that the criminal behaviors committed by Dahmer were highlighted without making the atmosphere of the interview confrontational.

Through the application of open-ended and indirect questioning techniques, the interviewer was able to allow Dahmer to expound freely on his experiences without feeling overtly accusatory. Therefore, it

was a reflective conversation contributing to the overall impression that Dahmer was cooperative rather than defensive. However, the interviewer also committed FTAs by asking direct questions completely at odds with Dahmer's efforts to shift blame or minimize the seriousness of his crimes. It was a fine balance because he was given space to create his self-image but could still justify himself while being criticized.

The neutrality of the interviewer as a technique contributed to the perception constructed by the public. With a professional tone and lengthy monologues from Dahmer, the audience could draw their conclusions yet could gently highlight inconsistencies in what Dahmer claimed. The questions were indeed reflective but ensured that nothing spoken by Dahmer was beyond critique. Furthermore, tone and technique are crucial in capturing the audience's attention. Because the interviewer did not use highly accusatory language, she was able to allow Dahmer to disclose much more about his thought processes, which in turn gave greater insight into his psychological state. Media can be powerful in storytelling for that reason, especially in criminal cases that receive a lot of publicity, where verbal framing has great influence over public perception.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper discusses the politeness strategies of the interviewer in the Jeffrey Dahmer interview, asserting that language choices determine interaction, control over it, and influence audience perception. Applying Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, this work classifies strategies employed in the interview as bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record polite speech with emphasis on their role in reducing face-threatening acts and providing power dynamics. It suggests that the interviewer has strategically balanced neutrality with assertiveness by using politeness to extract information while maintaining professionalism. This study contributes to media discourse analysis by pointing out that interviewers are key to conveying criminal narratives through effective strategic politeness.

6.1 Future Recommendation

This research can be further developed by conducting a comparison of the politeness strategies used by interviewers in multiple high-profile criminal interviews using a qualitative approach to identify some general trends within journalistic discourse. Additionally, non-verbal politeness markers such as tone, facial expressions, and body language may further enrich the material regarding strategies employed by interviewers. Furthermore, the research may delve into whether and how politeness strategies shape audience perception through the variation of linguistic choices that create public opinion about controversial figures. Cross-cultural dimensions could show how different norms of politeness coexist within diverse media contexts or landscapes, thereby helping to acquire an overall insight into what is considered journalistic politeness globally.

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Appendix

Interview Transcript

Dahmer: "I desensitized myself to it. I—I don't know—I went to great lengths."

Host: "He is pure evil, but you'd never know it by looking at him. But when you hear him, that's another story. His killing field was Milwaukee, and he got away with murder for more than a decade. But how could any of this happen? For the first time ever, Nancy Glass is here, inside the world of Jeffrey Dahmer."

Interviewer: "Bill, when I sat down opposite Jeffrey Dahmer for this interview, I wondered what he would tell me, how hard it would be to get him to discuss his horrific crimes. What I found was that he was very forthcoming. He volunteered details that may be difficult to hear. I began by asking what he wanted from the men he picked up."

Dahmer: "I had these obsessive desires and—and thoughts. Wanting to control them, to—I don't know how to put it—possess them permanently."

Interviewer: "And that's why you killed them?"

Dahmer: "Right, right. Not because I was angry with them, not because I hated them, but because I wanted to keep them with me. And as my obsession grew, I was saving body parts such as skulls and skeletons."

Interviewer Narration: "Jeffrey Dahmer is recalling his monstrous past. Almost two years ago, in this little apartment in Milwaukee, police discovered the grisly remnants of one of the most horrible crime sprees in American history. Jeffrey Dahmer, an unassuming chocolate factory worker, would eventually confess that he had seduced, murdered, and dismembered 17 young men. He even ate some of his victims' body parts. He instantly became the center of worldwide media attention—a serial killer unmasked. There were protests and press conferences in Milwaukee as people tried to understand how this could have happened in their midst. How did Jeffrey Dahmer get away with murder after murder for 13 years? How did a boy born into a hardworking, middle-class family turn into the worst kind of monster imaginable? In this exclusive interview, we put those questions to Jeffrey Dahmer himself. We met with him at the maximum-security prison where he is serving his sentence of 999 years. For the first time, he talks about his crimes and gives us a chilling look inside the mind of a serial killer."

Dahmer: "It's a process that doesn't happen overnight. When you depersonalize another person and view them as just an object—an object for pleasure instead of a living, breathing human being—it seems to make it easier to do things you shouldn't do."

Interviewer Narration: "The reason why Jeffrey Dahmer was able to get away with his crimes was because of just what you are seeing here. Jeffrey Dahmer is intelligent and articulate. That is what makes him so frightening. But if you listen carefully to his words throughout this interview, you realize it is a thin disguise."

Interviewer: "You do sound, though, like the kind of person who could have said to himself," "This is wrong. I must stop."

Dahmer: "I always knew, though, that it was wrong. But after the—the first—the first killing was not planned. I was coming back from the shopping mall back in '78. I had had fantasies about picking up a hitchhiker and taking him back to the house and having complete control and dominance over him."

Interviewer Narration: "The hitchhiker's name was Steven Hicks. He was just 18. Jeffrey took him to his parents' house. There, he strangled him with a barbell. He dismembered the body and hid it in a drainpipe. It was Jeffrey Dahmer who gave those details to the police in his confession."

Dahmer: "No one—no one—had a clue as to what was happening for—for over a decade."

Interviewer Narration: “During that time, Jeffrey Dahmer joined the Army and was sent to Germany. He was eventually discharged for a drinking problem and returned to Ohio. Nine years after Stephen Hicks' murder, the killing began again.”

Interviewer: “What happened to you in the nine years in between that you were able to stop, that you were able to control yourself?”

Dahmer: “There just wasn't an opportunity to fully express what I wanted to do. There was just not that—the physical opportunity to do it then. And I started, when I moved to Milwaukee in '81, I started reading pornography, going to the bookstores. Eventually, that led to frequenting the gay bars. And then I, one time, I brought this young man back to the hotel room—the Ambassador Hotel. I was just planning on drugging him and spending the night with him. I had no intention of hurting him. When I woke up in the morning, he had a broken rib here. I was heavily bruised. Apparently, I had beaten him to death with my fists.”

Interviewer: “And you have no memory of it?”

Dahmer: “I have no memory of it, but that's what started the whole spree all over again.”

Interviewer Narration: “Dahmer says he snuck the corpse of his victim, Steven Tuomi, out of his hotel room in a suitcase. Then he took it to his grandmother's house, where he cut up the body and put it in plastic garbage bags.”

Interviewer: “When you killed these men, afterwards, were you repulsed? Were you upset?”

Dahmer: “No, at the time it was—it was almost addictive. It was almost a surge of energy. I wouldn't have to worry about any of their needs or anything. I just had complete control of the situation.”

Interviewer Narration: “But Jeffrey Dahmer was out of control. The urge to kill had overpowered him. As police later learned, he wasn't satisfied with his victims' deaths. He wanted more.”

Interviewer: “Why did you photograph them?”

Dahmer: “It was my way of remembering their appearance—their physical beauty. I also wanted to keep something. If I couldn't keep them there with me whole, at least I felt that I could keep their skeletons. And I even went so far as planning on setting up an altar with the ten different skulls and skeletons.”

Interviewer: “And what was the purpose of the altar going to be?”

Dahmer: “Uh, as a sort of memorial point where I could—I don't know—it's, it's so bizarre and strange, it's hard to describe. A place where I could collect my thoughts and feed my obsession.”

Interviewer: “When the bodies were still in your apartment, there was no time when you would see them and say, “This is grotesque. What have I done?””

Dahmer: “There were times. There were times. But the compulsive obsession with doing what I was doing overpowered any feelings of revulsion.”

Interviewer Narration: “This man, with a quiet, almost shy demeanor, became a master manipulator who was able to lure strangers he met at gay bars to his apartment. He was even able to con the police into returning a 14-year-old boy to him after neighbors called 911, reporting that the child was in the street, naked and bleeding. Dahmer convinced the police that he and the boy were simply having a lover's quarrel.”

Interviewer Narration: “He was lucky to escape because, by then, the killing had become almost routine.”

Interviewer: “Before you went out to pick up a man, was there any kind of ritual you went through?”

Dahmer: "I'd go to the nightclubs, drink, watch the strip shows on TV. And if I didn't meet anyone at the bars, I'd go to the bath clubs and meet—meet someone there, offer them money. And we'd go back to the apartment, have a few drinks. I'd have the sleeping pill mixture already prepared. The person would drink it, fall asleep, and that's when they would be strangled."

Interviewer Narration: "Watching the movie Exorcist 3 was also part of his ritual. It put him in the mood for murder."

Dahmer: "I felt so hopelessly evil and perverted that I actually derived a sort of pleasure from watching that tape."

Interviewer: "Did you like feeling evil?"

Dahmer: "No, no, I didn't. But I tried to overcome the thoughts, and it worked for a while. But eventually, I gave in."

Interviewer Narration: "While Jeffrey Dahmer may say things today that make it seem like he understands what went on in his mind, he does not. All he can do is tell you what happened, but he cannot stop whatever it is that drove him to kill in the first place."

Interviewer Narration: "Do you still feel those same urges? Do you still feel that compulsion, that obsession?"

Dahmer: "I wish I could say that it just left completely, but no. There are times when I still do—still do have the old compulsions."

Interviewer Narration: "Jeffrey Dahmer says as time went on, his mind became more and more warped. And yet, he was clever enough to continue to elude police and lure young men to his apartment. We should warn you, the details are very graphic."

Dahmer: "I started having these obsessive thoughts when I was about 15 and 16, and they got worse and worse."

Interviewer: "What were your fantasies about?"

Dahmer: "Uh, they were sexual fantasies of control, power, complete dominance. They became reality."

Interviewer: "Was there pleasure in that fantasy?"

Dahmer: "There was excitement, fear, pleasure—all mixed together."

Interviewer Narration: "Jeffrey Dahmer fulfilled his fantasies by murdering and dismembering 17 young men. In time, his desires became more extreme, his deeds more grotesque. Listen to him talk about the most unnatural things in the most matter-of-fact of ways—that's when you realize that none of it has touched him."

Dahmer: "I was branching out. That's when the cannibalism started—eating of the heart and the arm muscle. It was a way of making me feel that they were a part of me. At first, it was just curiosity, and then it became compulsive. Then I tried to keep the person alive by inducing a zombie-like state by injecting first a dilute acid solution into their brain or hot water. And it never did completely work."

Interviewer: "Could someone like you be stopped? Could you be helped?"

Dahmer: "No. I was—I was dead set on going with this compulsion. It was the only thing that gave me any—any satisfaction."

Interviewer Narration: "He became so warped by his evil impulses that he even took a victim's head with him to work at the Ambrosia Chocolate Factory."

Dahmer: "I kept the mummified head and skull of one of the victims in a carrying case in my locker at work."

Interviewer: “Were you almost flaunting it?”

Dahmer: “Yes. But that's how strong the compulsion was. That’s how bizarre the—the desire was. I wanted to keep something of the person with me.”

Interviewer Narration: “Jeffrey Dahmer exhibited some disturbing behavior early on. He began drinking heavily as a teenager, dropped out of college, and was arrested for indecent exposure, disorderly conduct, and fondling a thirteen-year-old boy. Tragically, one of his murder victims would be that boy's brother.”

Interviewer: “Do you know what started it? Is there any kind of incident that you can remember?”

Dahmer: “To this day, I don't know what started it. And the person to blame is sitting right across from you. That's the only person—not parents, not society, not pornography. I mean, those are just excuses.”

Interviewer Narration: “His macabre 13-year crime spree finally ended when this man, Tracy Edwards, brought the police to the infamous apartment. Like the others, he had gone there with the promise of money.”

Interviewer: “What was the turning point for you that made you suddenly realize that you had done something terribly wrong—something you should be sorry for?”

Dahmer: “It was the night of the arrest. I have no memory of what happened during the six hours before the last victim ran out of the apartment. They heard a knock on the door, and the police were there with—with the last victim. They asked me where the key was to the handcuffs. My mind was in a haze. I sort of pointed to the bedroom, and that's where they found the pictures. They yelled, "Cuff him!" I was handcuffed, and it was just the realization that there was no point in trying to hide—hide my actions anymore. The best route was to help—help the police identify all the victims and just make a complete confession.”

Interviewer Narration: “When it was revealed that most of the victims were Black or homosexual, people in Milwaukee were incensed. Many felt that was why he went after them and why the police didn't seem to care when their families reported them missing.”

Interviewer: “Ten of your 17 victims were Black. Were they racially motivated?”

Dahmer: “It was not a racial preference. It was just to find an obsession with the best-looking young man I could find.”

Interviewer Narration: “Well, you just heard him say that his sexual preference had nothing to do with the killings. He has not come to terms with his homosexuality.”

Dahmer: “Never understood it. There was no use trying to fight it because I couldn't rid myself of it. It was—it was too powerful and persistent.”

Interviewer: “Do you dislike it?”

Dahmer: “Yes. It's caused a lot of problems for me—a lot of conflicts and unanswered questions.”

Interviewer Narration: “The conflicts remain with him, and so do his compulsions. But in prison, he finally cannot act on his savage desires.”

Interviewer: “If you were out on the street now, would you still be committing the crimes?”

Dahmer: “Probably. If this hadn't happened, there's no doubt I probably would be. I can't think of anything that would have stopped me.”

