

MARKET FOR MURDER

True crime shows and channels profit off of gruesome real life stories by focusing on killers instead of victims.



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Try to think of the name of just one of Jeffrey Dahmer's victims. A name that most recognize, Dahmer is one of the most infamous killers of all time, and yet most would be unable to recall any of his victim's names. *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* was named the second most popular English Netflix show ever in October of 2022, surpassing 1 billion total hours of viewership within 60 days of its release, according to [netflix.com](https://www.netflix.com). Why do most struggle to identify victims of notorious killers if popular shows and content constantly claim to focus on the victims?

Evolutionary psychologists say that humans are drawn to true crime because it allows them to feel like they are a part of an unfolding mystery, according to [sciencefocus.com](https://www.sciencefocus.com). They also say that it is human nature to be attuned to criminal behavior so that humans can discover how to protect themselves and their families. A 2010 study done by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that women are the true crime genre's main audience because they can learn the killer's motives and tips for self-defense.

Humans are naturally drawn to mystery and brutality, so focus is drawn away from the victims in true crime. While some content creators attempt to pay tribute to the victims, many use the intrigue of true crime and murders to gain more followers.

TikTok is one of the most popular platforms for true crime, with the true crime hashtag having 53.8 billion views. A popular aspect of true crime on TikTok is the investigation side of the genre.

In 2022, four college students were murdered at the University of Idaho, and the case quickly took over the news. Self-proclaimed "TikTok detectives" dove into the case, taking over the true crime hashtag. Conspiracy theories swiftly took over the app, accusing the victim's roommates, who had only just suffered the loss of four of their friends. A food truck owner also faced accusations, as well as a University of Idaho professor who, according to idahostatesman.com, even filed a lawsuit against a TikTok true crime personality for defamation.

All sensitivity has been completely removed from the true crime genre.



editorial cartoon **will huelskamp**

TikTokers accuse people left and right of heinous crimes, completely uprooting innocent people's lives. They do not have the qualifications nor the intimate knowledge of the crimes to be making claims to this degree. This turns people into victims of the money and popularity that is attained by being a true crime content creator.

On a scroll through TikTok, it is likely that videos with titles such as "Cookies and Crime" or "Makeup and Crime" will be seen. These clips can run at the top of a screen while a recording of the game *Subway Surfers* is played on the bottom half. Creators can achieve a higher viewer involvement by creating a cute and entertaining niche within the broad true crime genre. The addition of a fun activity in a true crime video, like doing makeup or decorating cookies, is highly inappropriate in the context of talking about brutally murdered people.

Upon a search of "makeup and crime" on YouTube, thousands of videos appear with hundreds of similar channels. The most popular creator is Bailey Sarian with her "murder mystery and makeup" series. Sarian gets upwards of 2 million views per video, with her higher posts getting up to 26 million views. Sarian has gained great popularity due to her captivating makeup skills and her comedic tone while describing the murder of a pregnant woman. While her style of telling stories and her cosmetic talents are certainly entertaining, her approach to the genre is disgustingly unethical.

Sarian covers cases like the John Wayne Gacy and the Chris Watts murders, both of which involve child victims. Child murders are extremely sensitive topics; an innocent life being maliciously taken is nothing to joke about. Sarian's videos do not approach the topics at hand with the required sensitivity and care. While she does not joke about the victims, she spouts jokes about the killers and other factors of the case left and right. Sarian also can be seen applying sparkly eyeshadow and raving about the pigmentation between clips of her talking about brutal killings.

While Sarian's humor in her videos is inappropriate enough, she takes it a step further with the monetization of her content. She has sponsorships from brands like Journeys, CaseTIFY, ExpressVPN, HelloFresh, and many more. She has also used the popularity of her channel to curate collaborative makeup lines with big brands, including her most recent Melt Cosmetics collaboration. The collaboration includes various items like the "Fatally Yours" eyeshadow palette and "Kiss of Death" lipsticks. Sarian is one example, but there are an endless amount of creators like her that crime cases and use the victim's stories for wealth.

When scrolling through videos posted under the true crime category on YouTube, very few will be found that are not sponsored. Just like Sarian, most of these creators are not interested in honoring the victims. They put on an act of wanting to educate viewers on the crimes and acknowledge the victims, but if that were the case, their videos would not be sponsored.

If the focus of true crime videos was on the victims, then the video thumbnails would not include large pictures of the killers. Unfortunately because of the unethical nature of true crime, viewers have been desensitized to heinous crimes. Empathy is hard to come by for victims when the main draw to the true crime genre is the audience's interest in the killers and the nature of their crimes. •