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"You make yourself into a monster so you no longer bear responsibility for what you do": *Dexter*, Naturalism, and Neoliberal Crime Discourse

This article examines Showtime's popular crime series *Dexter* (2006-13) as a text which draws on a range of themes, aesthetics, and ideas typically associated with naturalism. It focuses in particular on the relationship between the program's naturalist attributes, gender-based violence, and neoliberal crime discourse. Reflecting a broader twenty-first-century resurgence in contemporary American culture, naturalism is clearly a key component of *Dexter*. This is the case even as central components of naturalism – notably determinism – are inconsistently integrated into the program's narrative structure and thematic concerns. The show's protagonist, Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall), works by day as a forensic scientist for Miami Metro PD, but is in his spare time a serial killer. If this marks a sensationalist scenario consistent with a tradition of naturalism, then it is even more significant that, at least initially, Dexter is depicted as being compelled to kill by biological and environmental forces beyond his control. That *Dexter* drifts, especially during its latter seasons, from this commitment to determinism is understood in the following as an indication that components from naturalism are appropriated, rather than the program-makers demonstrating any firm commitment to naturalism. Dexter is only compelled to kill by determining forces, that is, when it suits the show's political ideology. After briefly assessing how naturalism manifests in the show, this article examines the extent to which the program-makers represent Dexter's actions as involuntarily determined as a means to absolve him from moral responsibility. This depiction has the combined effect of maintaining audience sympathy for the serial-murdering protagonist and reinforcing the show's neoliberal political stance. Finally, the essay examines in more detail how naturalism is used in *Dexter*, in terms of the models of masculinity the show presents, and its neoliberal discourse on crime and the American justice system.

***Dexter,* Neo-Naturalism, and Moral Responsibility**

As a number of critics and theorists have observed, American literary naturalism is especially notable for two interdependent attributes: its longevity, and its lesser commitment to determinism, compared to its European counterpart. Given that this article critiques the inconsistent deployment of deterministic forces in *Dexter*, American naturalists' relatively loose commitment to determinism should first be acknowledged and addressed. Citing an identifiable body of classical American literary naturalist texts, Eric Carl Link notes that while "human agency is called into question in each of those works […] these novels can hardly be said to embody a clear philosophical position of one sort or another" (86). Earlier in the piece, Link has already contrasted a more rigid European naturalism with "the presence of competing philosophical visions and narrative forms" in the work of American literary naturalists (81). Link argues moreover that to insist on philosophically rigorous determinism in naturalism is to commit a category error, confusing "literary and philosophical discourses, which certainly overlap at times but are not co-equal" (85-86). As a result, to expect that American naturalist texts "serve as surrogate philosophical treatises intended to express a coherent philosophical dogma is to confuse modes of discourse and to set up a situation where these works will be subject to potentially unjust criticism as fundamentally flawed narratives" (86). All of this is to suggest that many of the thematic and formal attributes of American literary naturalism which are typical are nevertheless not necessarily defining characteristics. Other critics remain more inclined to retain a commitment to determinism as a crucial component of naturalism. Ian F. Roberts, for example, in the same volume as Link conducts a scathing critique of Donald Pizer's tendency to downplay the importance of determinism, suggesting that such a move represents an attempt to "domesticate naturalism and muzzle its philosophical bite" (123). The present article takes the position that while determinism is a less central tenet of the American form of naturalism, it nevertheless

remains a key component. One of the measures by which to assess *Dexter* as a text that engages with naturalism, in other words, is through the various ways in which it employs a deterministic frame of causation. As we shall see, *Dexter*'s inconsistent use of determinism in some ways places it alongside the less dogmatic form of American naturalism appraised by Link. But it is the way in which this usage is instrumentalized as part of the program's various neoliberal discourses that make *Dexter*'s engagement with naturalism interpretable as opportunistic.

Like other twenty-first-century naturalist television dramas such as *The Wire* or *The Shield*, *Dexter* exploits its extended serial format (96 episodes in total) to construct a lengthy narrative arc preoccupied with tracing specific causes and effects. In this sense, *Dexter* features an archetypal naturalistic narrative structure, including a plot wherein the central character is apparently coerced by overwhelming deterministic forces, comprising Dexter's irresistible urges to kill. Stretched over such length, the narrative of *Dexter* thus possesses the capacity to trace in detail the manifold forces determining the behavior of its main protagonist, alongside a number of other important characters.

The principal characteristic demonstrating the show's apparent commitment to a deterministic naturalism is the backstory concerning the origins of Dexter's murderous behavior. Dexter's urges are presented as a mix of biological and environmental determinants. While this ostensibly accords strongly with a philosophically deterministic form of naturalism, the specifics of this combination are curiously unconvincing. Until the final season casts doubt upon this interpretation, Dexter is understood to be congenitally a psychopath. Much emphasis is placed on predominantly pop-cultural and stereotypical symptoms of psychopathy or sociopathy, such as Dexter's lack of empathy or emotions, and his effortless presentation of an affable exterior mask to his co-workers. Dexter's tendency towards criminality is underscored as biologically determined when it is revealed during the

course of the first season that both his parents had criminal pasts. It is also, however, apparently exacerbated by Dexter's childhood experiences. Over the course of the first season Dexter gradually recovers memories from when he was aged three, of witnessing his mother's brutal murder at the hands of drug dealers. He and his older brother Brian – whose existence he had also forgotten until this first season – were then left sitting in pools of blood in the shipping container in which the murder happened. After several days, they are rescued by police, including Officer Harry Morgan (James Remar), who adopts Dexter (but not Brian). This childhood trauma is posited as contributing further to Dexter's transgressive adult behavior.

Indeed, the producers and writers never seem entirely to decide whether Dexter's innate psychopathy or his childhood trauma, nature or nurture, are primarily to blame for his murderous urges. Perhaps the most accurate diagnosis – unlikely as this sounds – would suggest that congenital sociopathic tendencies (heredity) predispose Dexter to being affected by the trauma of his mother's death (environment) in such a way as to turn him into what he is. The lack of clarity regarding Dexter's origins as a killer is neatly illustrated by a collection of essays on the program, Bella DePaulo's *The Psychology of Dexter*. Around three-quarters of the essays in this collection devote strenuous efforts to diagnosing Dexter, with particular reference to his origins. Notably, the authors devise strikingly contrasting and generally incompatible diagnoses, ranging from psychopathy, through PTSD, to a product of Harry Morgan's grievances against the justice system. This latter strain, that Harry not only misdiagnosed Dexter but was opportunistic in devising the "Code" which ordains the criteria for Dexter's kills, emerges from a few of the essays in DePaulo's collection. As explored later, this is a significant interpretation in terms of the show's neoliberal perspective on criminality.

Diagnosing Dexter is thus not only beyond the scope of this article, but also fundamentally futile. The point here is instead to emphasize the extent to which the program-makers deliberately obfuscate Dexter's origins as a killer; his transgressive adult behavior is heavily overdetermined with multiple and diffuse causes. The effect of making Dexter's homicidal compulsions so heavily accounted for by his back story is to grant him minimal agency in the present, crucially diminishing his moral responsibility for the killings. Overdetermined determinism, so to speak, all of which seems intended to underscore how little choice Dexter exercises, and functions as part of the overall exercise in eliciting and maintaining audience sympathy for a serial killer.

Right from the start of the pilot episode, for example, the title character is depicted as under the sway of irresistible urges. The opening shot depicts Dexter driving through a busy Miami evening, while his voiceover intones, "Tonight's the night, and it's gonna happen again and again. *Has to* happen" ("Dexter"). Dexter's actions from the outset are overtly presented as determined rather than freely willed, thus immediately encouraging the audience to absolve him from moral accountability. Moreover, the very first killing witnessed by the show's viewers (although far from being Dexter's first murder) is of a male choirmaster who abuses and kills young boys, such an unequivocally unsympathetic character that the audience is further manipulated in Dexter's favor. James Manos, the creator of the TV show, acknowledges that this strategy was employed at the earliest stage possible in order to encourage audience sympathy for Dexter: "Who wouldn't kill a pedophile who's killing little kids? … That's the opening scene of the pilot, and it really endears the audience to this character" (23-24).[1] As we shall see, this is merely the earliest example of a strategy which

[1] This is worth comparing to the pilot episode of another neo-naturalist crime show, *The Shield* (FX, 2002-08). In this episode, audience sympathy for the otherwise dubiously amoral protagonist is similarly elicited when Detective Vic Mackey is tasked with interrogating a pedophile who is suspected to have incarcerated a young girl at a secret location. The audience's potential distaste for Mackey beating the information out of the suspect

deepens as the show progresses, whereby the audience is subtly coerced into agreeing with Dexter's neoliberal ideological perspectives on crime and justice through a tactical deployment of deterministic naturalism.

The construction of a scenario morally weighted so heavily in favor of Dexter arguably undermines Manos's stated project of attempting to solicit sympathy for an unattractive character.[2] This is of a piece, however, with other strategies deployed in relation to the show's protagonist. Besides portraying him as forced by impulses to kill, and depicting his first screen killing as justified, Dexter, in every other respect apart from being a serial killer, is represented as utterly unthreatening. He exhibits otherwise exemplary socially conventional behavior, this element reinforced by Michael C. Hall's charismatic and diffident performance. Dexter is white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, and by the fourth season a family man and father. As Victoria Smith observes, "the writers go out of their way to stress Dexter's heterosexuality and lack of misogyny" (392-93), which not only further lessens his threat, but differentiates him from most of the killers he dispatches. Bar serial killing, in other words, Dexter is as entirely inoffensive as it is possible to be for the target audience.

Another key to maintaining audience sympathy is Dexter's ostensibly strict code regarding whom he deems a legitimate target, as devised for him by his adoptive cop father Harry.[3] Harry claims to have early recognized psychopathic tendencies such as killing animals in Dexter, and decided that his adopted son's urges could not be stopped. While this reasoning is dubious, and arguably ludicrous, the significance lies in this being another means through which the program-makers strenuously deny Dexter agency. Indeed, the opportunism

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is mitigated by the unequivocally evil acts of the suspect. Comparisons between *The Shield* and *Dexter* are particularly pertinent since the two shows share a number of writers and production staff, including Manos.

[2] As he explains in an interview with Douglas Howard, Manos deliberately set himself the challenge of constructing a TV series with a serial killer protagonist, who nevertheless becomes the object of the audience's sympathy (23).

[3] The eighth season belatedly reveals that the Code was actually devised in conjunction with child psychologist Dr. Evelyn Vogel (Charlotte Rampling), but this does not significantly affect points made here.

involved in *Dexter*'s deploying naturalism in such a way is neatly mirrored by Harry's morally questionable devising of the Code. By the sixth season Dexter expresses sustained doubts to "Harry" regarding whether the latter did the right thing.[4] "Harry" claims that he gave Dexter the Code to prevent him becoming like Brian, who is also revealed to have become a serial killer, albeit without Dexter's superficially ethical rules:

> DEXTER: Making me a killer was the best you could do?
>
> "HARRY": You were already gonna be a killer.
>
> DEXTER: I guess we'll never know. ("Ricochet Rabbit")

This conversation refers to Harry's decision not to seek therapy for the adolescent Dexter, but to redirect his allegedly incurable murderous urges. "Harry's Code" is thus devised, a form of conduct ostensibly predicated on producing two beneficial effects: firstly, focusing Dexter's urges towards those who have killed or would kill innocents, and secondly, to ensure that Dexter remains free from institutionalization. The main strictures of the Code are not to get caught (before he dies, Harry teaches Dexter ways to cover his tracks, a learning process only enhanced by Dexter's subsequent career in forensics), and only to kill those who demonstrably deserve to die. The experiments and psychological manipulation Dexter underwent as a child reiterate the extent to which his behavior is from an early age externally determined. Indeed, this overtly evokes the way in which classical naturalism itself conducts experiments upon (fictional) subjects as a means to explore human behavior. When Dexter discovers the extent of this manipulation, he angrily describes himself as "nothing but a lab rat" ("Scar Tissue"), an utterance which foregrounds this issue so overtly as to become an almost metafictional manifestation of naturalism. This is a neat parallel, since within the text

[4] Harry is in quotation marks to remind the reader that he appears in flashback in seasons one and two, but thereafter as Dexter's imaginary interlocutor. Some critics have referred to this later Harry as a ghost, but it is more accurate to keep in mind that what Harry actually represents in these scenes is Dexter's consciousness considering moral and/or practical issues regarding his career as a killer, often predicated on contested interpretations of Harry's Code.

Dexter is opportunistically labelled as an untreatable psychopath by his father, an action which mirrors the program-makers' instrumental and selective deployment of determinism as a means of soliciting support for *Dexter*'s political discourse on crime.

The key point here is that however dubious the diagnosis Dexter is given as a child, Harry's devising the Code reinforces the sense that Dexter is not responsible for his actions. Coupled with his self-conception as a psychopath – which in later seasons is thrown into doubt – this initially allows Dexter to believe that he is compelled to act in certain ways and therefore free of any sense of guilt. Dexter's permission to believe in his own lack of agency is again attributable to both Harry and the program-makers. Through parallel acts of dubious morality, Harry gains a vigilante killer who rights the inadequacies he perceives in the justice system, while the program-makers acquire support for their neoliberal discourse on crime and justice. The dynamic whereby Dexter is reaffirmed as lacking in agency and subject to manipulative determining forces is strongly emphasized early in the show's run. At the end of the first season, Dexter encounters his long lost brother Brian (Christian Camargo), who also doubles as the "Ice Truck Killer". When they finally meet, Dexter is apprised by Brian of the extent to which Harry lied and manipulated him. Rudy reconfirms Dexter as a victim, "trapped in a lie," thanks to Harry and the Code, and therefore less than fully responsible for his actions. Brian also describes child Dexter as "a little bird with a broken wing" ("Born Free"), an image which vividly underscores his victimhood and diminished agency. That so much stress is placed on Dexter's relative passivity at this early stage is significant, since reducing his responsibility for his actions is another clear strategy for fostering audience sympathy. That Rudy is ultimately revealed to have an ulterior motive of attempting to recruit Dexter to a form of serial killing without the moral sheen provided by the Code, suggests that notions of Dexter as a helpless victim should be treated with skepticism.

The degree to which Dexter's actions are portrayed as determined ebbs significantly as the series progresses. Flashbacks to Dexter's childhood and adolescence, with their heavy emphasis on how Harry influenced Dexter's behavior through the development of the Code, are seen only in the first two seasons. From then onwards, Harry appears as Dexter's imagined interlocutor, a manifestation of Dexter's own consciousness, or indeed conscience, as he wrestles with moral decisions. This may be taken as an indicator of Dexter beginning to exercise more free will, through a gradually more flexible interpretation of Harry's Code. Thus, in seasons one and two, when the focus remains on ensuring that the audience favors Dexter, the flashbacks emphasize that Dexter's behavior is determined, both through heredity and environment. In season three by contrast, Dexter is becoming increasingly independent, cautiously exercising greater free will and acquiring a friend/accomplice in Miguel Prado (Jimmy Smits), the Miami Assistant District Attorney. Dexter has developed also in that his fiancée Rita (Julie Benz) is by this time pregnant with their son. Again though, the situation with regard to Dexter's agency and free will is deceptive. Miguel is actually manipulating Dexter, and when Dexter finally realizes this, his furious reaction suggests that for all his claims that he acts largely due to compulsions, he actually has a fierce need to be in control.

Whatever its true extent, Dexter's greater autonomy, coupled with his embracing of the normativity of family, evoke particular American neoliberal fantasies of, respectively, the independent individual and domesticity. Dexter's engagement with these fantasies is couched in part through arguments around free will and determinism. These arise in relation to Rita's pregnancy in the third season, as "Harry" observes that Rita and her children were only ever supposed to provide a cover for Dexter's serial killing, whereas they seem to have become genuinely important to him ("Turning Biminese"). "Harry" pointedly reminds Dexter that sooner or later he will have to make a choice between Rita and the Dark Passenger. Dexter's neoliberal fantasies are decisively terminated at the end of the fourth season, when he is

indirectly culpable for the bloody murder of Rita. At this point, Dexter is seemingly back under the sway of determinism, and is punished for daring to believe that his behavior could be freely willed.

Later seasons depart more definitively from the position that Dexter's behavior is strictly determined, as he apparently develops a level of free will. It is significant that this greater autonomy is carefully presented not as an attribute which Dexter potentially possessed all along, but something new, arising largely through the love of Hannah (Yvonne Strahovski), a fellow serial killer. This novelty is emphasized in the final episode, before he embarks on the mercy killing of the comatose Debra (Jennifer Carpenter), his adopted sister. At this point, Dexter's voiceover expresses how for so long he wanted to be like everyone else and to feel emotions, but that he now wants to return to an affectless state ("Remember the Monsters?"). In other words, the program-makers are careful not to undermine the earlier established overdetermined determinism, the mitigating narrative that Dexter was not morally responsible for his actions. It is instead stressed that Dexter has changed.

Dexter's developing recognition that his actions may be more freely willed than he had previously thought is investigated in detail much later in the show's run. In particular, an episode towards the end of the seventh season, "The Dark…Whatever", probes further into the ethics of Dexter's exonerative self-construction as a monster driven by impulses beyond his control. Trying to explain the "Dark Passenger" to Hannah, Dexter refers to it as "this thing living inside me, telling me what to do, saying I *have* to kill, not leaving me any choice." Hannah is skeptical, in a way which challenges the notion of morally exonerative determinism: "You're not a puppet. Of course you have a choice …. C'mon Dex, it's just you" ("The Dark… Whatever"). Given what is ethically at stake, Dexter is unsurprisingly resistant to Hannah's skepticism, as he explains in a voiceover: "Hannah's wrong. Of course I have a Dark Passenger. There's no other way to explain this compulsion." A later

conversation with “Harry,” however, reveals that the Dark Passenger was precisely what Hannah suggests, a figure invented when Dexter was aged twelve to protect him from confronting and taking responsibility for his own monstrosity. While Harry then let this pass out of tenderness for the boy, “he” now comments, “But you’re not a boy anymore, and maybe Hannah’s right and the Dark Passenger is just a feeling.” Dexter’s language in rejecting this again reveals the high ethical stakes:

> DEXTER: Because if there’s no Dark Passenger, then I’m responsible for everything I’ve done.
>
> “HARRY”: It sure is a whole lot simpler to just pin all the blame on something else, isn’t it, Dexter? It’s much scarier to think that the Dark Passenger is no more real than I am.

This is a key conversation, laying bare more clearly than any other in the entire run the motivation behind Dexter’s conception of his murderous urges as irresistible compulsions. If the “Dark Passenger” is an exonerative invention on his part, then Dexter actually is “responsible for everything [he’s] done.” Bearing in mind once more what “Harry” really represents, this is a highly significant moment, since it represents Dexter arriving at some important self-realization, and a potential assumption of moral responsibility. After this point, the previously ubiquitous Dark Passenger is never mentioned, and it is as if the series here shifts. The façade of a relatively committed interrogation of determinism slips, to be replaced – in the show’s final season – with a predominantly trite portrayal of the triumph of neoliberal freedom, as embodied in Dexter’s newly emerging free will.

If Dexter is at this point slowly disabused of using compulsion as a means to evade moral responsibility, this is an issue broached more tentatively earlier in the run. In the second season, Dexter and Lila (Jaime Murray), an Englishwoman with whom he has

established a relationship, discuss responsibility and the notion of evil. Perceptively, she states, "You make yourself into a monster so you no longer bear responsibility for what you do" ("See-Through").[5] In other words, Lila recognizes how Dexter constructs the monstrous side of his nature as compulsive and thus coerced, a convenient method of avoiding moral blame. What is particularly interesting here, however, is that the show puts this perfectly valid assessment of its protagonist into the mouth of Lila, who is eventually exposed as a manipulative liar. In this instance, any critique of the employment of determinism as an exonerative ideological tool is thus subtly undermined and rejected.

Dexter's attempt to use exonerative determinism represents a maneuver increasingly apparent in twenty-first-century American public and cultural life, not least as a strategy of those in positions of relative power as a way of denying their agency. Characters' or texts' use of determinism as a way of rationalizing morally suspect behavior is similarly a recurring characteristic in a wide array of American neo-naturalism. It is worth asking why the deterministic framework of naturalism might be particularly attractive for contemporary and neoliberal American cultural production. This is obviously a complex question, requiring a considered response to an intricate matrix of cultural conditions, but some of the answers relate back directly to the issue of determinism and moral responsibility. A first set of answers might be proposed in relation to 9/11, and the domestic and foreign policy responses of the American government. 9/11 itself, according to the numerous newspaper and journal articles, and nonfictional and fictional accounts, engendered widespread feelings of helplessness. Ann Kaplan, then a New York resident, describes how the attack caused feelings that "history and memory, time and space collapsed into one present time of terror" (4). Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* likewise depicts the widespread feelings of abject fear experienced by New Yorkers in the days and weeks following the attacks. Such

[5] At this point Lila believes Dexter to be a drug addict, and is unaware of the murderous nature of his real addiction.

overwhelmed emotional responses may be reasonably compared to experiences familiar to protagonists of naturalist narratives, in the encounter with forces greater than themselves.

Secondly, the simultaneous increasing dominance of global neoliberalism during this period can be perceived to have engendered a similar sense of disempowerment. This is also reflected in a number of twenty-first-century naturalist texts, in particular those positioned more at the margins of mainstream US society in terms of wealth, ethnicity, and/or gender. Neoliberalism is inclined towards "the dismantling of public entitlements such as education and welfare and the construction of alternate versions of the social safety net that allow states to appear sovereign in the eyes of national populations, such as prisons, semicarceral workfare, and military expansion" (Elliott and Harkins 5). Removing this safety net, neoliberalism casts millions of already disenfranchised Americans instead into potential encounters with repressive institutions such as law enforcement and the state prison complex (although its ideologues would deny such a relationship). Such pressures are clearly commensurate with an art form such as naturalism which places the individual against overwhelming forces.

Thirdly, and most relevant for this article, it is broadly acknowledged that characters exercising no or limited free will bear reduced moral responsibility for their behavior, since their actions are not fully under their control. Characters depicted as operating according to deterministic forces are thereby freed from complete responsibility for their actions. Clearly, this grants considerable ideological license to writers or program-makers, since determinism may be appropriated as an exonerative device for those who are not truly disempowered. In other words, naturalism, with its conception of individuals forced to act in particular ways, may thus represent an attractive cultural form to those with powerful vested interests in justifying morally dubious neoliberal and neoconservative projects at home and abroad. Depicting such actions as born of necessity, forced and determined, is evident across a broad

range of contemporary American cultural production, and is especially marked in the new naturalism. Dexter Morgan provides a particularly pertinent example in this respect, a virtual mirror of an American polity being "forced" into morally suspect behavior. At least initially, Dexter's actions are strenuously exonerated, being overdetermined by a cocktail of biological and environmental determinants, as he is relentlessly presented as suffering diminished agency. As a middle-aged white American heterosexual male who works on the forensics team of the Miami Metro PD's homicide department, however, Dexter is in a position of relative social power. The following section analyses the dubious moral and political ideologies at the heart of this portrait of a passive masculinity, allegedly in crisis.

Dexter, Naturalism, and the Beset White Male

An episode in the second season, "That Night, a Forest Grew", begins with Dexter and Lila having sex. The scene pointedly contrasts Lila's assertiveness with Dexter's customary passivity: she is giving him detailed instructions in order to help him bring her to orgasm, a practice he subsequently admits he did not object to. The putative power relationship here is underscored by the scene's visual imagery; while they are in bed a shadow resembling a spider's web is cast over Dexter's naked back (see figure 1). Later in this episode, the audience becomes aware of Lila's volatile narcissism, and the extent to which she seeks to control Dexter. Afraid that he is going to leave her to return to Rita, Lila sets her apartment on fire in order to regain his attention. Notably, the first thing she burns is the hand and arm of a statue on which she had been working, that is, the instrument of action. The sex scene, and this episode in general, is emblematic of the way in which Dexter embodies a form of masculinity which masquerades as passive and acted upon, part of the wider representation of him as a character whose behavior is externally determined. More broadly, it is an element of the program's construction of a white, middle-class masculinity which situates itself as beset on all sides by forces which threaten its hegemony. Several feminist critiques of the show

have examined the type of masculinity Dexter represents. The implications of these in terms of determinism and the program's perspective on crime and justice are worth exploring in more detail.

Lisa Arellano's reading broadly approves how *Dexter* offers up "a new and promising variation of the representational relationship between masculinity and violence" (132). Employing a model of contesting masculinities, Arellano notes that in each season Dexter is confronted by a killer whose masculinity is founded on a particular form of violence. Rudy in season one is sexually sadistic, for example, while Miguel Prado's violence in season three is partly a consequence of his Oedipal issues. Arellano notes that in the final exchanges he shares with these other killers, Dexter rejects a particular form of violence, especially against women. As with Dexter's apparent subjugation to deterministic forces, these exchanges reinforce the audience's sympathy for the protagonist. "Dexter and his violence need to be continuously distinguished from violent men and violent practices that are wrong, bad, and unacceptable," Arellano observes, and the show achieves this by evoking "familiar archetypes of masculine violence in order to invite our recognition *and condemnation* of these men and their violence" (143, original emphasis). For Arellano, this distinction between Dexter's and the violence of the Other "opens a space for Dexter's unusual heroism" (143).

This interpretation is worthy as far as it goes, but notably fails to connect this support for a justifiable form of male violence, broadly that of the avenging vigilante, either to America's problematic attempts to defend its own violent interventions around the world in the early twenty-first century or to the inequities of domestic neoliberal law enforcement. And while Arellano's noting the multiple masculinities is useful, it glosses over some of the more problematic elements in Dexter's depiction, most obviously in suggesting that his still highly patriarchal and paternalistic violence represents heroism. Arellano does not discuss in much detail the fifth season's arc, for example, where Dexter teams up with Lumen Pierce

(Julia Stiles), in order to take down a gang of men who serially abduct, torture, rape, and murder young women.

Dexter inadvertently rescues Lumen when he is killing Boyd Fowler, one of the gang who had been keeping her captive and torturing her. Lumen has witnessed Dexter's murder of Boyd, and as a result "Harry" urges Dexter to kill her (and it is essential to reiterate at this point that "Harry" really represents Dexter's conscience) ("Beauty and the Beast"). "Harry" argues that, according to the Code, Dexter "doesn't have a choice," which translates as meaning that deterministic forces make it essential that Dexter is violent towards this woman. "You're out of options now," continues "Harry," "she's left you no choice" in a formulation which contrasts strikingly with previous seasons. For example, Dexter notably prevaricates in killing Miguel in season three and, especially and fatally for his wife Rita, Arthur Mitchell in season four. By contrast, in the face of a suddenly seemingly expendable woman, Dexter is tempted to insist that the "don't get caught" rule of the Code ascends to primary importance, even though in terms of representing any kind of criminal threat Lumen fails entirely to fit the Code. While Dexter ultimately resists this interpretation of the already patriarchal Code and decides not to kill Lumen, he does physically restrain her using plastic ties in his car and hold her at knifepoint before trying to win her trust by showing her the bodies Boyd had earlier disposed. These contrasting incidents suggest that Dexter's behavior unwittingly accords strongly with a compatibilist position on free will and determinism. As Ian Roberts notes, compatibilism states that "a free act is not one that is undetermined, but simply one which is not constrained by certain types of coercion or psychological compulsion [….] Indeed, for an act to be free it must be determined by one's own personality and preferences" (125). As a result, "rather than being incompatible with determinism, free will actually requires it" (125). Dexter's decisions regarding the fates of Miguel, Arthur, and Lumen are therefore determined

by circumstance but also thoroughly compatible with Dexter's freely willed desires as a dominant male in a patriarchal society.

Another feminist reading of the show, Michele Byers' book chapter entitled "Neoliberal *Dexter*?," argues that no matter how the program apparently sets out to critique traditional notions of masculinity, it ultimately endorses them, alongside neoliberal perspectives on criminality. Neoliberal discourse typically disavows social causation of crime – including precisely the kind of inequalities produced by neoliberal policies – and instead conceives of criminals as acting autonomously, either through rational choice or because they are simply the kind of "monsters" discussed above, standing outside community and in opposition to the social self. As Byers observes, this produces a situation where guardianship of the law and definitions of criminality become predominantly the domain of the white male. In the case of *Dexter*, this manifests as, "a warning that taking the law into one's own hands is – as the Bush government so often demonstrated – the prerogative of privileged white masculinity" (Byers 146). Just so, Byers notes that in *Dexter* we see the "incursion" of people of color and women into law enforcing institutions which were previously the domain of the white male. These state institutions are then seen to fail, forcing Dexter, a white male operating outside the law, to fulfill a role of "tidying up after the state's failures" (147). As Dexter insists to Debra, "Sometimes the system doesn't work. Killers fall through the cracks" ("Sunshine and Frosty Swirl"). Given that she is a female who has staged just such an incursion into the formerly male world of law enforcement this is doubly pointed, reminding us moreover that Dexter's role originates in patriarchal law enforcement, the Code having been devised by his bitterly disillusioned cop father. As should be clear by now, there is a strong sense that the Code opportunistically masks its neoliberal and patriarchal elements beneath a psychological discourse which asserts that its purpose is to protect Dexter.

Once more, this raises key questions regarding whether the declared compulsion under which Dexter operates is in reality an equally instrumentalist vehicle for the show's underlying neoliberal and patriarchal discourses. Dexter's vigilantism is carefully presented as being justified by both its utilitarian efficacy and biological and environmental determinants, but his night career also conveniently re-establishes the law as that of the white male. For example, in season four Dexter moves in as Rita's husband and the father of their child, and thus more clearly adopts the role of the white male patriarch. Very soon afterwards, their neighborhood is beset by acts of vandalism. Dexter eventually determines that these are being carried out by another local resident, Andy, who has lost his job and wife and is carrying out anti-social behavior out of jealousy towards his affluent neighbors ("Blinded by the Light"). Dexter threatens Andy with dire consequences should he not stop his campaign in an attack whose severity, given the relatively trivial nature of Andy's crimes, ultimately represents white, male, middle-class suburbia viciously protecting its interests against someone suffering downward mobility under neoliberalism. Similarly, Byers refigures Arellano's interpretation of the killing of Sergeant Doakes, who in the second season harbors strong suspicions about Dexter, not as the vanquishing of an errant form of violent masculinity, but representing rather the expulsion of a black police sergeant from the white male institution of law enforcement. Notably, Doakes, hitherto the show's main representative of non-white law enforcement, is replaced in the next season by Quinn, a white male Irish-American.[6] As Byers puts it, in season two, Dexter "get[s] rid of those Others […] women [and] Black men […] who could see through his performance" (151) of white, middle-class masculinity. Byers here refers also to the manipulative and ultimately murderous Lila, who is also positioned as a transgressive threat to Dexter's neoliberal vigilante role.

[6] A similar maneuver happens in *The Shield*, when an African-American, Tevon, is co-opted onto the Strike Team. After only a few episodes he is marginalized, having been left in a coma following a fight with Shane, the Team's most overtly racist member.

While Byers's argument is in broad strokes persuasive, it is also a little reductive, although it would be unfair not to acknowledge that she does observe how complex *Dexter* is as a text, and how the ideological discourses, especially regarding masculinity, are equivocal and shifting. This article also has the advantage over her reading in that Byers was writing after only the first three seasons of the show had screened. In season four, the nature of the threat to neoliberal and patriarchal law enforcement is by contrast anything but "Other." That is, the serial killer encountered by Dexter in this season, the so-called Trinity Killer Arthur Mitchell (John Lithgow), is a white, middle-aged family man, active in the local Christian community. Initially, Mitchell seems a mirror of the protagonist, successfully living the kind of double life Dexter wants to emulate, using his apparently idyllic family life and travelling charity work as a cover for his murderous activity. Dexter several times conspicuously prevaricates when he has the chance to kill Mitchell, justifying this by claiming that he wants to learn, by observing Mitchell, how to balance family and serial killing. Dexter's delay would seem to provide further support for Byers' argument, since Dexter has finally encountered a killer who closely resembles himself, a white, middle-class patriarch, whom he is apparently unable to kill. This scenario is complicated, however, when it is revealed that Mitchell's placid family life is a sham, and in fact his wife and teenage children live in constant fear of him. When Dexter finally appreciates this, he does take the first opportunity to kill Mitchell. Significantly, though, this is only after Mitchell's true threat as an outsider to neoliberal and patriarchal family values is revealed.

Matters are further complicated in the following season, where Dexter joins forces with Lumen Pierce, against her former abductors, a vicious gang led by Jordan Chase (Johnny Lee Miller). Chase lives a double life as a popular inspirational speaker who preaches a social Darwinist and masculinist message. Although their criminal activities are seemingly way beyond societal norms, with even the hardened police officers appalled when

they watch videos of the men torturing their abducted victims, these acts are nevertheless connected to the neoliberal and social Darwinist ideologies in Chase's lectures. The preaching of this social Darwinism is another of *Dexter*'s more overt forays into naturalism, as signaled most clearly by a season five episode, "Take It!" The cold open depicts Chase delivering one of his motivational speeches to an enthusiastic audience, beginning the looping together of naturalism and (as it turns out toxic) masculinity that underlies the climax to the season. Over a montage of animals killing in the wild, underlining a "survival of the fittest" discourse, and accompanied by the bellicosity of Holst's *Mars,* Chase declaims:

> We are born primeval. Conceived with the impulse to fight for what we desire. It's written in our genes. It's engrained in our souls. But we've traded the wilderness for pavement, trees for skyscrapers. We've lost touch with our instincts, with what we are. We have fallen from nature's grace. [The camera here cuts away from the montage to an extreme close-up of Chase.] But we shall be delivered! ("Take It!")

Chase urges the predominantly white male audience to "seize the power of instinct. We're gonna cast off those shackles that bind us to jobs we hate, people we don't love, lives that aren't worth living. We are going to…take it!" The sadistic killer thus preaches a theme based on male rage, not even disguising its violent dimensions, but instead emphasizing how society allegedly dulls natural masculinity.

That this is satirically intended is suggested by Dexter's bathetic response in voiceover: "I've never been around so many people who made *me* feel normal." The point is that the horrific acts carried out by Chase's gang are ultimately interdependent with, rather than inimical to, the neoliberal ideology he preaches to his followers. Significantly, Dexter and Lumen disagree on this point, when discussing the extent to which Chase's ideology stems from the gang's first abduction and torture of a woman:

LUMEN: Jordan's whole philosophy – transforming your life, blah, blah, blah – it all came from destroying her. That moment turned Jordan into a monster.

DEXTER: My guess, he was already a monster. ("In the Beginning")

This would support Byers' reading, in that Dexter seems at pains to downplay a natural link between the type of neoliberal ideology for which he has provided tangible protection and the violence of Chase's gang. This link is for the Other, the female Lumen, much clearer, as she perceives how the killings and Chase's public persona are heavily imbricated. Ironically, unlike Dexter, even Chase seems willing to admit this link. As he is on the kill table between Dexter and Lumen, Chase is still playing the motivational speaker, complimenting Lumen on her "beautiful" transformation from victim to killer, claiming "If you hadn't met me, you would never have known you had it in you" ("The Big One").

Seasons four and five thus complicate but by no means demolish Byers' reading. In season four, although Dexter kills a serial murderer who initially seems to represent neoliberal values, he prevaricates until this is revealed to be a sham, and Mitchell is actually unmasked as a threat to the nuclear neoliberal family. Season five offers a stronger challenge to Byers' reading, since Dexter is partnered in this series by a strong woman who is previously the victim of sadistic males who espouse explicitly neoliberal and social Darwinist ideology. Lumen and Dexter combine in a notably equal partnership (after an initial struggle) in order to take down Chase and his team. Lumen is increasingly proactive in this partnership, and it is she who kills Chase in the final episode of the season. On the other hand, Dexter is, as suggested above, reluctant to draw a connection between Chase's neoliberal ideology and his actions – instead seeking the conventional recourse of labelling Chase as a monster and a self-responsible individual – whereas Lumen perceives a logical

connection. The concluding section analyzes links between neoliberalism and criminality in more detail, with specific reference to discourses of crime and justice in the show.

Dexter, Determinism, and the Ideology of Harry's Code

Writing on the televisual representation of crime in the 1980s and 1990s, Elayne Rapping observes that public defenders "came to be seen as the bad guys […] who worked so hard to let these rabid criminals run loose upon our streets to mug and burgle and maim and kill again" (11). Compared to earlier sympathetic characters such as Perry Mason, these portrayals represent part of a conservative backlash on crime which, Rapping concludes, has the ultimate effect of propagating and reinforcing American justice as "a system increasingly, by popular demand, hell bent on putting more and more Americans in prisons for longer and longer time periods and for less and less socially 'dangerous' crimes" (253). These observations are clearly relevant to *Dexter*'s discursive position on criminality. As Stephanie Green notes, *Dexter*'s environment is "the familiar fictionalized one of middle-class television America, in which violent crime is a disproportionate and sensationalized threat" (582). The program thus plays on typical anxieties and presumptions of the middle class American viewer, for example that urban crime is out of control, and can only be addressed through extreme social oppression and punitive measures. This discourse emerges especially in *Dexter*'s third season, when Assistant District Attorney Miguel Prado forms a temporary alliance with Dexter. This friendship is based on their shared grievance regarding criminals escaping justice, about which Miguel directs particular rage against the prominent defender Ellen Wolf (Anne Ramsay). The season comes to a head as Dexter's ingrained Code clashes with Miguel's broader conception of who represents a deserving victim. The relationship between these two viewpoints reveals much with regard to the discursive position on crime and justice in *Dexter*.

Dexter, from his name onwards, strenuously claims rightness. When found by Harry in the horrific circumstances of the shipping container where his mother had been murdered in front of him, Dexter has blood visible on his left cheek. As an adult, before he kills, Dexter inflicts a scalpel wound on his victims' cheek, in order to take a drop of their blood as a memento. Without exception, this cut is made to the right cheek, as if Dexter is righting the original sin perpetrated upon his and his mother's body. Consciously intended or not, this ritualistic action reinforces Dexter's larger project of self-justification. This project is also channeled through the equally rationalizing form of Harry's Code. Ashley Donnelly describes the Code as "strict and defined and absolute" (17), arguing that "the moral code by which [Dexter] dictates his own actions helps to establish a clear line between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' deviance" (23). This is, however, overstating Dexter's rigor, since the series provides plenty of occasions on which Dexter stretches, slips from, or otherwise violates the ostensibly rigid determining force of the Code.

To reiterate, the Code originates in patriarchal law enforcement, being a law of the father born in large part from Harry's frustrations as a cop. Isabel Santaularia claims that the Code of Harry "responds to a perceived crisis of patriarchal authority in a changing social climate" (66). In this way it therefore represents an articulation of the type of neoliberal discourse in crime television described by Rapping. Recognizing the ostensibly moralistic Code as in fact deriving from the frustrated impulses of a disenchanted retired lawman usefully connects the way in which Dexter's behavior is depicted as compulsion to the neoliberal ideology on law and order in America that the program embodies. Several critics have suggested that Dexter's serial killing was by no means as inevitable as Harry insisted. Marisa Mauro, for example, argues that presenting Dexter's killings as biologically and/or psychologically determined behavior obscures the role of nurture. Harry thus acted

disingenuously, both in adopting and training Dexter, in fact recruiting him "to satisfy his need to catch bad guys, grooming Dexter to be a killer" (Mauro 172).

Whatever its origins, and the extent to which Harry is dishonest with regard to his motivations, by the time we encounter the adult Dexter he has fully internalized the rationale and operating principles of the Code. At the start of the third season, for example, his voiceover blithely (re)introduces him to the audience: "If society drops the ball then someone else has to pick up the slack. That's where I come in" ("Our Father"). Dexter is at this point seeking to kill Freebo, an alleged perpetrator of double homicide, who has "skate[d] on a state police screw up, otherwise known as Florida's catch and release program. He does the deed, gets away with murder and falls off the police radar. Everyone's radar but mine" ("Our Father"). A few elements are notable here. Firstly, the "screw up" is left entirely unspecified, while "catch and release" represents a right-wing dog whistle – a favorite campaigning phrase of Donald Trump, for instance – for criticizing alleged judicial leniency. Secondly, Dexter characteristically refers to Freebo as a personal burden, again justifying his own actions as essential. Neither is Dexter infallible in this respect, since in pursuing Freebo he kills the wrong man, the first time Dexter has so overtly violated the Code, even if inadvertently. This is an act which not only undermines his arrogant assumptions about natural justice, but also, since this wrong man was Oscar Prado, brings Dexter into the orbit of his older brother, Miguel. This action therefore instigates the concerted neoliberal critique of the justice system which comprises much of the third season's thematic focus.

Dexter's brand of natural justice is very much to the fore two episodes later, in "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." From the title on, this episode is one of the show's most overtly naturalistic, and it draws together a number of issues relevant to this article, including patriarchy, natural justice, and neoliberal discourse on crime. Dexter comes to notice that a convicted sex offender, Nathan Marten, is taking an interest in Rita's prepubescent daughter,

Astor. Marten served four years for previous crimes, but Dexter is no believer in either the rehabilitative capacity of the criminal justice system or, given his self-conception, the ability of the individual to overcome their inner drives. In this vein, Rapping reminds us that according to conservative TV crime shows, criminals are mysteriously "brutish, irrational, and inherently incapable of understanding or abiding by any legal code or […] of being rehabilitated" (58). Still believing at this point that his killings are an unshakable compulsion only manageable through the Code, Dexter unsurprisingly concurs with this perspective, dismissing the possibility that Marten might be curable. "From the outside," Dexter declares in his voiceover, Marten "looks normal. But like me his brain is flawed and he has a compulsion he's unable to control" ("The Lion Sleeps Tonight"). More broadly, this has interesting implications for the show's engagement with naturalism. It seems as though determinism works differently for Dexter, for whom it provides an excuse for his actions, whereas for antagonists such as Marten heredity and environment trap them into inescapable forms of behavior which, as Dexter here insists, cannot be overcome, controlled, or, as in his case, channeled. More precisely, Dexter manages to direct his compulsions via a determinism inflected with compatibilism, whereas Marten's urges cannot be reconciled with a course of action that is compatible with acceptable societal norms.

Dexter's pursuit of Nathan Marten is notably couched, through an unusually arch voiceover resembling that of a natural history program, in animal and natural imagery. Thus while Marten, the sex offender, is "the jackal," Dexter is "the lion," protecting his pride. The episode concludes with Dexter rehearsing well-worn justifications for extreme punishments before killing Marten, stating "nobody hurts my children." While Astor is as yet not even his step-daughter, it is relevant that Dexter is soon to become a biological father, as this underscores the patriarchal rhetoric at the heart of the events of this and other episodes. Thus, as well as dealing with the threat to Astor, Dexter decides that he will take responsibility for

his imminent baby. Reiterating the naturalistic language, the episode ends with Dexter, after declaring to Rita his intention to be an active father, remarking to himself, "After all, it's a jungle out there" ("The Lion Sleeps Tonight"). The conservative affirmation of family values, in this case, is explicitly tied to the series' engagement with naturalism.

This storyline complements Dexter's growing relationship with Miguel Prado, many of whose own violent tendencies are environmentally deterministic, tracing back to difficult experiences with his father. Miguel suspects Dexter's vigilante role, but he is highly sympathetic, due to the frustrations inherent in his own job as a prosecutor. Miguel regularly rails against the justice system in tones which precisely echo neoliberal discourse on crime and justice. Early in their relationship, Miguel deliberately primes Dexter with information about a suspected perpetrator of a double homicide. When Miguel later drags out a confession that Dexter has acted on this information, he is delighted: "I gave you the chance to avenge two women whom the system failed, and just like I hoped you seized that opportunity" ("Turning Biminese"). At this point, Miguel articulates a perspective on crime which heavily underscores Dexter's, thus providing further support for the underlying neoliberal message, that individuals are required to act in order to address flaws in the law enforcement process.

Gaps soon appear, however, between Miguel's and Dexter's perspective on the justice system. In the following episode Miguel, while talking to Dexter, points to a statue of Justice and asks, "real reason she's blindfolded? So she doesn't have to watch everything she stands for get pissed on by someone like Ellen Wolf" ("Sí Se Puede"). As well as proactively making plans for their next kill, in which he is keen to participate, Miguel begins a campaign of trying to persuade Dexter that they should kill Ellen Wolf. Dexter considers this, but refuses, since although her actions have led to those he regards as dangerous criminals walking free, she in no way fits his Code: "I'm not a fan of Ellen Wolf's [sic] but all I see is a

defense attorney doing her job. Maybe too well, but I can't kill her for that" ("Easy as Pie"). Their relationship is finally destroyed when Miguel ignores Dexter's warnings and kills Ellen Wolf regardless. Miguel's brutally perverted understanding of justice is ultimately too extreme even for Dexter. It is therefore possible to read Miguel's actions as a critique of neoliberal discourse on criminality, since this ultimately leads to the murder of an innocent. Miguel's actions have the additional effect, however, of making Dexter's less extreme, but nevertheless thoroughly neoliberal, position appear reasonable. Viewer sympathy is thus scrupulously maintained not only for the protagonist, but also for his ostensibly more ethical version of neoliberal natural justice. The conflict with Miguel and its inevitable resolution – Dexter kills him – in the end thus insidiously reinforces the value of Dexter's less extreme neoliberal perspective on crime.

Such a reading is supported elsewhere in the program's run. Certain killers are portrayed as almost cartoonishly huge physical and moral threats, such as Ray Speltzer whose monstrous acts and lack of remorse help to win Debra around to Dexter's perspective. Early in season seven, having discovered his secret, Debra is trying to help a reluctant Dexter wean himself off killing. She hopes to prevent Dexter taking action over Speltzer, who – in another example of the show's tendentiousness – happens to be one of the most unequivocally evil and sadistic killers depicted. Witnessing Speltzer's unrepentant glee at the police being unable to take any action against him, Debra begins to understand Dexter's position. Seltzer is freed when video evidence reveals that he did not assent to having his rights read, the program once more implicating the dysfunctionality of the legal justice system. Dexter subsequently kills Speltzer, while Debra, distraught at the thought of the violent criminal having escaped because of legal issues, admits she's "glad," but asks "what does that make me?" To which Dexter replies, "Human" ("Run"). In other words, it takes only around four episodes between Debra – a sympathetic character and clear audience identification figure –

discovering her brother's secrets and being at least partially persuaded to his extreme neoliberal perspective on criminality.

In the show's concluding episode, Dexter kills a final serial murderer, Oliver, in a police cell where the event is captured on CCTV. Only the most lenient of eyes would interpret it as self-defense, yet this is exactly how two of Dexter's detective colleagues describe it, when reviewing the footage with him ("Remember the Monsters?"). The detectives thus give guarded sanction to the final killing we see Dexter perpetrate (bar the arguable mercy killing of Debra, who has suffered a paralyzing stroke). It is worth noting just how badly Oliver has been painted, since this again indicates how heavily the program strains to justify Dexter's actions, this time even going so far as to condone an example of a notorious "death in custody." Dexter's fatal stabbing of Oliver is given tacit police, therefore official, approval. In other words, in the final episode we witness those in official law enforcement roles endorsing the circumventing of the legal justice system, and avoiding the dangers of not securing a conviction. Harry would have been delighted.

Conclusion

It is appropriate to return to Harry here, since he represents *Dexter*'s tendency to sympathize with those in positions power who nevertheless deny their responsibility by claiming to be acting through compulsion. The Bush administration, which overlaps with *Dexter*'s early seasons, sought to use exonerative determinism to justify measures such as the invasion of Iraq or the Patriot Act, similarly claiming to be forced by circumstance. Harry espouses an ideology that seeks to shore up white male power in the name of necessarily correcting the flaws in the legal justice system. Dexter is a vehicle for this modus operandi, created by Harry and groomed into believing that he is both acting in a morally admirable way, and has no choice. As we can see from the above description of the final episode, even if Dexter

during the later seasons begins to appreciate that he is able to exert more agency than he thought possible, he nevertheless retains access to an ethical coding which provides largely spurious support for his actions. Ultimately it represents an unusual form of compatibilism. Dexter's determining urges are undoubtedly compatible with his more freely willed neoliberal perspective on crime, but he also continues to convince himself that his murderous acts are driven compulsions.

Michele Byers argues that *Dexter* is "in large measure, about freedom, about who has the right to be free and to act with impunity to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their moral code" (147). This is arresting, as Dexter's "freedom" would seem to be at odds with the way in which he is depicted as acting according to powerful urges. In many ways, this is the paradox at the heart of the show, and one way in which it attempts to negotiate this is through the portrayal of Dexter as acting with strictly limited freedom, according to the Code. This reflects a similar paradox at the heart of neoliberalism itself. As Rachel Greenwald Smith notes, "the exercise of individual freedom becomes a requirement that the subject is compelled to fulfill" (81). To put it another way, responsibility is imposed on the neoliberal subject, albeit couched in terms of freedom. Thus the Code and Dexter's apparent acting through overdetermined forces (the possibly misdiagnosed innate psychopathy, the childhood trauma producing PTSD, the Code of Harry itself) are a convenient smokescreen enabling him, and vicariously Harry, to avoid accepting moral responsibility. It is doubly troubling in this sense, since Dexter's exercise of considerable freedom as a white, heterosexual, middle-class male is obscured. In other words, and appropriately so for a show with a motif of masking, Dexter's compulsions, his overdetermined determinism, are designed to mask his relative freedom and the neoliberal ideology he conveys.

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Figure 1 – *Dexter*, season 2, episode 7, “That Night, a Forest Grew”.