

”I LIVE BY MY FATHER’S LAW”

Masculinity, Serial Murder and Heroism in *Dexter*

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Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman aiheena on maskuliinisuus ja sankaruus televisiosarjassa *Dexter* (2006-2013). Sarja kertoo sarjamurhaaja Dexter Morganista, joka elää isänsä hänelle opettaman moraalikoodin mukaan. Maskuliinisuuteen tutustutaan aiemman tutkimuksen avulla, jolla kartoitetaan maskuliinisuuden historiaa 1400-luvulta nykypäivään ja selvitetään, kuinka käsitys maskuliinisuudesta on muuttunut aikojen saatossa. Lisäksi käsitellään muita maskuliinisuuden ilmentymiä, kuten latinalaisamerikkalaista maskuliinisuutta ja naisten maskuliinisuutta. Teoriaosuudessa käsitellään myös sankaruutta, ja miten sankaruus ilmenee populaarikulttuurissa.

Analyysiosiossa pureudutaan siihen, miten maskuliinisuus näkyy päähenkilö Dexter Morganissa ja kysytään, voidaanko häntä pitää nykyaikaisena maskuliinisena miehenä. Lisäksi tutustutaan latinalaisamerikkalaiseen maskuliinisuuteen Dexterin kollegassa Angel Batistassa ja naisen maskuliinisuuteen Dexterin siskon, esimiehen ja vaimon yhteydessä. Tutkielma osoittaa, että Dexterillä on useita maskuliinisia piirteitä, kuten eristäytyneisyys, kyvyttömyys ilmaista tunteitaan sekä maskuliiniseksi mielletävä fyysinen olemus. Hänen maskuliinisuutensa kuitenkin muuttuu televisiosarjan edetessä, ja siihen kiinnitetään huomiota myös tässä tutkielmassa.

Sankaruutta pohtiessa on otettu huomioon sankarimyytin lähtökohdat ja se, miten Dexter niitä sekä rikkoo että vahvistaa. Hän on sarjamurhaaja, jota voidaan pitää sankarillisena sen vuoksi, että hän kohdistaa väkivaltaiset pakkomielteensä pahantekijöihin, kuten murhaajiin, raiskaajiin, hyväksikäyttäjiin ja huumorikollisiin. Omien sanojensa mukaan Dexter pitää kaupungin puhtaana rikollisista. Samalla kuitenkin on pohdittava sitä, että Dexter lienee kuitenkin enemmän antisankari kuin sankari, koska päällimmäisenä motivaationa hänellä on omien mielihalujensa

toteuttaminen. Hän on riippuvainen verenvuoduksesta ja murhaamisesta, ja ainoa asia, joka häntä rajoittaa, on hänen isänsä luoma moraalikoodisto.

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## 1 Introduction

There are numerous stories of serial murderers written in the world. In many of them, the killer acts purely from his or her lust of killing and without any higher morals or goals. They aim only to satisfy their twisted needs and they all kill for different reasons. Most have been traumatized as children, but are others just pure evil? This Master's thesis attempts to discover the roots and reasons behind such devilish deeds in the context of popular culture, television to be more precise. Television series *Dexter* (2006-2013) is the story of a serial killer with higher standards and moral code. He kills to please his Dark Passenger, but he also kills to make the world a better place.

Dexter Morgan (played by Michael C. Hall) is the protagonist of the series. He is a regular man with an almost regular line of work. He is a blood spatter expert for the Miami Metro Police Department. The series depicts his relationships with other people, how he manages to be 'one of us' and still carry his deep, dark secret inside of him. The series makes us wonder how many of the people around us have a secret and do we even want to know about them. On the one hand, Dexter is a nice, helpful man and nobody seems to have anything bad to say about him. On the other hand, he is a predator who finds his victims from the files of the police department and kills them cruelly and neatly.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the two sides of the story. The first half of the thesis focuses on the masculinity in the series. I try to discover how masculinity is represented in it and does the protagonist Dexter fit in to the traditional idea of Western masculinity. Dexter's adoptive father Harry is also strongly present in

the series despite of his passing away before the timeline of the series begins. Therefore, he and his influence on Dexter will also be considered in the thesis, too. There is also some discussion of the Latin masculinity and how it is presented in Dexter's colleague Angel Batista (played by David Zayas). I also study the masculinities of the main female characters Debra Morgan (played by Jennifer Carpenter), Maria LaGuerta (played by Lauren Vélez) and Rita Bennett (later on Rita Morgan, played by Julie Benz).

The other half of the thesis focuses on the role of the serial killer in contemporary fiction and how the serial killing is presented in *Dexter*. It also studies heroism and antiheroism and how they are depicted in the series, thus seeking to find out whether or not we can call Dexter Morgan a hero or not. The final part of the analysis concentrates on the reasons why we enjoy this serial killer story and its protagonist as much as we do.

Previous studies have been conducted of the topic, mainly in the United States. The studies I have found so far have mostly discussed the morality of the series and the justification of Dexter's actions. In some studies it has been discussed whether or not Dexter could be considered as a superhero, but my research focuses more on the idea of an "everyday hero". There might some aspect that can be related to superheroes, as well, but my hypothesis is that Dexter is a regular man doing quite the opposite things.

The episodes discussed in this thesis are the pilot of the show, episode 3 of the first season, episode 10 of season 2, episode 4 of season 3 and episode 5 of season 4. These episodes have been chosen for this thesis quite randomly but in such a way that

the development of the character can be seen in them. The first episode of the series is rather important in presenting the character because of the way American entertainment industry works. The pilot episode is the one that, roughly said, can make or break the series. Therefore, the first episode of Dexter presents us an emotionless serial killer with a near to perfect cover story. He speaks mostly about himself and his manners, letting the viewers get to know him. As the series advances, we get to see new sides of Dexter, some of them quite surprising.

Even though these episodes have been selected for closer observations, it is necessary to discuss the series from a wider perspective, as well. The series and the characters develop constantly, as it can be seen in the analysis section. The characters must consider issues that deal with birth, death, love and hate, and they all handle them in their own way. Violence present in the series, therefore it is somewhat present in this thesis, as well.

## 2 Of Masculinities, Serial Murder and Heroism

This is the theoretical part of the thesis, where the tools of the analysis are presented. It is divided into two sections, the first section studies masculinity and how it has changed from past to present. Different things are expected of men and this theory section attempts to illustrate how these expectations have formed and what the situation is today. There is also some consideration about masculinity and violence and how these two are linked together in research. The second section focuses on heroism, the different aspects of it and how there can be many kinds of heroes from superheroes to the man next door. It is necessary to note that this thesis only discusses the idea of masculinity in the area consisting mainly of North America and Western Europe, as the concept of masculinity is still very different in different parts of the world.

### 2.1 Masculinity

How can we define masculinity? First of all, masculinity is the opposite of femininity, without femininity there can be no masculinity. There are several different theories of masculinity and, as several other psychoanalytical and sociological theories, many of them are somehow related to Freud and other famous sociological theorists. The study of masculinity is a relatively new field of research and its origins are in feminist studies.

Being a male in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not easy considering the expectations produced by the society and men themselves. A man needs to be masculine, the main

breadwinner, a passionate lover, a kind father and a productive employee as described by Rosalind Miles (1991, 121). The image that popular culture gives us of how a man should be like is overwhelming and it creates pressure on men. But has it always been the same? Have the ideals of a manly man changed?

The modern view of masculinity began to form in the period from about 1450 to 1650. During that period the modern capitalist economy came into being and what we now think of as the traditional gender order was created, as well (Connell 2007, 247). According to R.W. Connell, “four developments seem particularly important for the making of those configurations of social practice that we now call “masculinity””. In order to understand the present situation it is important to know some details about the history.

The first phase was the beginning of the deterioration of religion’s influence on people’s lives as the monastic system crumbled and Reformation began (Connell 2007, 246). People’s religion became more private than it had been before and heterosexual family life was emphasized. These were the key prerequisites for the idea of masculinity, as it was used to describe a man’s behaviour and actions. As Connell says “with masculinity defined as a character structure marked by rationality, and Western civilization defined as the bearer of reason to a benighted world, a cultural link between the legitimation of patriarchy and the legitimation of empire was forged.” (Connell 2007, 246). Naturally, the opposite of rationality was emotionality and it was and still is connected to femininity. This legitimation of patriarchy and empire lead towards the colonization of the world.

The second development was the colonization and creating overseas empires. As the people who went overseas were mostly men and women came only as wives and servants, colonization was a male enterprise from the beginning. The imperial states were staffed by men almost completely which lead way to the dominance of men. The men who went overseas first, that is the conquistadors, can be defined as masculine by our modern terms. They were loners, violent when needed and difficult to control by the state (Connell 2007, 246).

The third key phase happened during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as people's lives became more urban and therefore more private and anonymous. Protestant ethic was high, men worked hard as the women stayed home. A hard worker was considered masculine and those who did not work for their living were not as appreciated. Also the biological differences between men and women were more closely observed and the attitudes towards deviances hardened. A person was required to be either a man or a woman (Connell 2007, 247).

The fourth key development was the European civil wars. The strong centralised state that was born after the wars institutionalised men's power. Professional armies formed during the religious and dynastic wars became a crucial part of the modern state. Soldiers fought each other defending their honour which soon became an issue of masculinity and nationalism. The most masculine characters in the North Atlantic countries were the nobles and the landowners as they had power and money (Connell 2007, 248-249). These characteristics are still considered to be masculine; strength, power and success in life.

Masculinity has developed into what it is now during the course of the centuries and what began as simple manly features has now been divided into an array of subordinated and marginalized masculinities (Connell 2007, 249). The common factor of the “old” masculinity from the age of the conquistadors and today’s masculinity is violence. This thesis focuses on serial killing and the masculinity of a certain fictional serial killer and therefore this theoretical background also sets the focus on violence and masculinity and how they are intertwined.

As Michael Kimmel says in his book *Manhood in America* “What it means to be a man in America depends heavily on one’s class, race, ethnicity, region of the country. To acknowledge these differences among men, we must speak of masculinities.” (Kimmel 1996, 5.) There are different types of masculinities present in Dexter, from female masculinity to hispanic masculinity. However, there is one definition against which men in the Western world measure themselves and it is called hegemonic masculinity. In the North American culture, the “complete” man is straight, white, middle class and native-born American (Kimmel 1996, 5-6.)

Hegemonic masculinity is the masculinity of the white Western men. Other masculinities, such as female masculinity and Hispanic masculinity are also studied in this thesis. As Kimmel writes, men “used [others] as a screen against which those “complete men” projected their fears and, in the process, constructed this prevailing definition of manhood.” (Kimmel 1996, 6). The other varies from time to time, as an “old” other becomes more familiar and incorporated into the society, “new” others appear. There is always something for people to be afraid of.

Masculinity can basically be defined as a set of characteristics, qualities and roles appropriate, or desirable, for a man. Popular culture, that is television, cinema and literature, affects the way we think about these features and what kinds of features we consider to be masculine. A traditional symbol of masculinity is the frontier man, who has fought for his land and has usually obtained it with violence. A frontier man is also a loner, does not need anyone, especially women, close to him but takes care of himself and fights for what he considers to be his own (Connell 2007, 251-252). What is especially interesting about the American masculinity, it is defined in men's relations to other men, not in relation to women. Men's greatest fear is that other men see them as weak, timid or frightened (Kimmel 1996, 6-7).

Anthony Easthope writes about *Red River*, a John Wayne western in which Wayne plays a lone cowboy, Dunson, who has decided to go to Texas and drive cattle there and take the land as his own. He is has a symbolic son but no wife and he does not hesitate to kill when necessary and he violently abuses those who are the closest to him.

“He is both judge and jury, teacher and preacher.

With all the ruthless determination of the masculine ego he gets his men to drive the cattle north, giving them no rest. The cowboys are his sons. One he tries to whip for stealing sugar -- Another three rebel against him and he shoots them. When he decides to hang the two who steal food, one complains that the law might see it differently. Dunson replies, ‘I’m the law.’ He is projected as the full father, wholly self-sufficient masculine will.”

(Easthope 1990, 20).

The purpose of this rather long quotation is to crystallize what the idea of masculinity is in Westerns. The masculine man does not care for anyone but himself, does not need anyone close to him, can tolerate companions as long as they act as he wants them to and stands behind his actions without showing any remorse.

As the ideal masculine men are portrayed as mentioned before, it is not hard to believe that there is very little room for homosexuality or other sexual preferences that deviate from the “normal”. The potential for homoerotic pleasure was expelled from the masculine and heterosexuality became a required part of manliness during the Second World War (Connell 2007, 253). The image of a masculine man became more precise as men began to take over in the industrial field. Factory workers and coal miners were all men and women stayed home, even though during the Industrial Revolution women were important workers in especially in the textile factories. Work in heavy industry factories became tougher and the men who worked in them were the masculine ones. Men and women had different spheres where they lived, men were the breadwinners and women were the caretakers.

After browsing how masculinity has been defined before, it is time to focus on the present situation. Masculinity is always bound to the cultural and social settings it is portrayed in and therefore it can be stated that no such thing as modern masculinity actually exists. One may consider Arnold Schwarzenegger to be the ultimate masculine man with his muscles, another can think of a mouthy tough guy rap artist to be the image of masculinity (Whitehead 2007, 16). In order for describing a masculine man, we can think of certain features that are common to different types of masculinities.

Masculine men are loners, they lack the tools to successful relationships. Empathy, sensitivity and understanding are the tools required for creating and sustaining relationships (Whitehead 2007, 156). These skills are generally thought of as feminine qualities and therefore the opposite of them can be considered masculinity. Masculine men are also capable of violence for different reasons, pride, honour, self-protection, defending their close ones, or just for the sake of it. Masculine men are expected to find respectable occupations with which they can be the breadwinners of their household and ensure a steady income (Messerschmidt 1993, 94). Even though it is fairly common that both parties of a heterosexual relationship go to work and support the household, men are still often considered to be the head of the family. As Rosalind Miles states, it is a man's obligation to get married and start a family in order to be fully accepted into the society. "Marriage is compulsory because it is a crucial test of a man's ability to establish himself in the eyes of other men. Getting a wife, forming the essential unit that will provide the basis for a family, is a central way for a man to prove he is a *Mensch*." (Miles 1991, 128). This can be seen also in *Dexter* and will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

This, in addition to the other demands men need to deal with, can cause pressures that a man cannot handle. Men face expectations that they feel like they need to meet. "It is no secret who commits the vast majority of crime. Arrest, self-report, and victimization data all reflect that men and boys both perpetrate more conventional crimes and the more serious these crimes than do women and girls." (Messerschmidt 1993, 1). As Nancy J. Chodorow claims, there is a complex link between gender and violence that can be explained with drives, as Freud already did in his time. Drives are

basically incompatible with our modern society, as we cannot follow them without breaking all the rules and laws (Chadorow 2002, 235-236).

Many studies show that men are especially violent towards women and their violence is often uncontrollable and spur of the moment type of violence. Men are violent towards the women closest to them all over the world, thus it is not merely a problem of a certain cultures or even continents (Whitehead 2007, 35). It is a known fact that the most dangerous time in a woman's life is the period after a break-up with a man. As Kenneth Polk says in his book *When Men Kill* (1994), the threat of separation and the feelings of jealousy are the things that arouse the violence towards spouses (Polk 1994, 28). In addition, for some merely the fact that they are married to their wives gives them the right to beat them, that it is in their "essential nature" to control their wives and the best way to do it is to batter them (Messerschmidt 1993, 147).

But what is it that makes men violent? Part of it can be explained with the male hormone testosterone which can cause violent behaviour. But not all men are violent, therefore this explanation has to be contested. "Aggression is an attitude, not a biological imperative, and as such it is heavily taught, initiated and encouraged in boys from birth, and certainly from well before puberty, the first time they have any testosterone to speak of." (Miles 1991, 211). Masculinity explains some of the violence, as the men who have not been given or taught the ability to handle difficult emotions and anger, channel it outwards and express them in all the wrong ways with violent behaviour.

Even though gender cannot be chosen, the proper psychic identity must be defined. Men must create their own manliness and its routines (Miles 1991, 124). The

division between masculine and non-masculine men is no longer as clear as it used to be as the clear boundaries between the two genders blur (Connell 2007, 257). Men are having more to choose from as they define their own masculinities but they are also under more pressure as the demands towards them are growing still.

## 2.2 Serial Killers, Heroes and Antiheroes in Popular Culture

This subsection discusses the theories of serial killers in popular culture, heroes and antiheroes. I would like to point out that some of the theoretical background of this thesis is extended into the analysis section, as there are surprisingly many studies conducted on Dexter during the past few years. I will refer to them in the analysis section in order to compare my own findings with these previous studies and see what they have in common and what is different.

Serial killers have been a popular theme in popular culture ever since the 1970's. As Alzena MacDonald states in her article *Dissecting the "Dark Passenger": Reading Representations of the Serial Killer* (2013), "it seems a truth universally acknowledged that the serial killer has achieved an overwhelming ubiquity in popular culture" (MacDonald 2003, 1). Ever since the success of John Carpenter's *Halloween* in 1978, serial killers have become the popular villains of television, film and literature (MacDonald 2003, 1). They create fear and anxiety in people because of their random killing of innocent victims, often young women.

There are different kinds of serial killers we seen on the screen from the cannibalistic Hannibal Lecter to the stylish and sadistic Patrick Bateman. MacDonald claims that the serial killer genre itself has become a synonym to uninhibited slaughter and it often even more sadistic than the “usual” killings we see on television and cinema: “discourse of serial killing, as serial killers, in both their generic construction and practice, take pleasure in violating bodies: rape, dissection, and cannibalism.” (MacDonald 2013, 6). According to Leonard Cassuto, the serial killers in American fiction are sexual psychopaths, who only kill for their own pleasure and do not have any compelling needs to kill their victims, other than the overwhelming desire they have for it (Cassuto 2009, 243).

As Cassuto says, the only way our minds can process serial killers is to understand what they are and how they became what they are. We must label them as monsters that are not like us (Cassuto 2009, 243-244). Thus, the human mind needs to conceptualize and understand the Other in order to be able to live with it, or at least with the knowledge that they exist. We do not need to accept their acts but we need to understand why they do them. People tend to try to find explanations to everything, as nowadays we aim to control all aspects of life, even though it might not be possible. People are completely vulnerable and scared if we do not know why someone or something acts the way they do.

The one thing that makes serial killers threatening is their ability to blend in to the crowd. Simultaneously, they are isolated and usually do not share their activities with anyone. They do not find pleasure in social relationships between people, but instead, they enjoy hunting on the community. Cassuto also claims that “the serial

killer is a special kind of monster, one who was born human and has somehow strayed from the human community.” (Cassuto 2009, 244).

But what makes a human stray from the rest of humanity? It is a popular view that something bad must have happened to a person if he or she becomes a serial killer and nobody is evil from the birth. According to Cassuto, criminologists, psychiatrists and novelists all share the same view; an abused child becomes a serial killer (Cassuto 2009, 259). This can be seen in, for example, Hannibal Lecter’s story. As a young boy in *Hannibal Rising* (2007), he loses his parents and little sister and that can be seen as the beginning of his notorious life as a serial murderer and cannibal. There are also some films that feature a killer who is evil from the birth, such as Damian in the horror film *Omen* (1976), but in his case, he is the son of the Devil and cannot actually be compared to a serial killer of regular human parents.

Serial killer fiction, as all fiction, has its roots in the real world. Serial killers are not, sadly, just figures of writers’ imaginations, they have real life paragons dating back to the age of Jack the Ripper and, much later on, Ted Bundy, to name a couple. They killed innocent people whose main characteristic was that they were young women. As Jane Caputi states in her article *The New Founding Fathers: The Lore and Lure of the Serial Killer in Contemporary Culture* (1990), they can be considered as the role model for today’s fictional serial killer. Furthermore, she claims that their originate from our culture: “It is mythically necessary to leave the paternity of these killers nebulous and even multiple, for their true father is indeed a collective identity – the patriarchal culture that has produced the serial killer as a fact of modern

life.” (Caputi 1990, 8). Therefore, it is no wonder that the serial killer theme in popular culture is so, well, popular.

Serial killer fiction on television usually depicts the serial killers from the view point of those who attempt to catch them. As David Schmid writes in his book *Natural Born Celebrities* (2005), television shows such as *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files* and *Profiler* are all created to boost the image of the FBI as their protagonists catch serial killers and keeping the world safe. They also promote the Otherness of the serial killer by depicting them as aliens, strangers among the good and honest people, thus keeping the audience feeling secure (Schmid 2005, 139). It is surely a comforting thought that the serial killer cannot be “one of us”. However, as it was mentioned above in Cassuto’s theory, they are masters of disguise and can well be mistaken for regular people.

Philip L. Simpson also discusses the serial killer’s ability to hide behind the face of normal people in his book *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer through contemporary American film and fiction* (2000). He claims that the serial killer can achieve a legendary status by hiding his or her monstrous face behind the human one. “Any given killer has one pleasant or at least non-threatening face with which to conduct public negotiations and another evil face with which to terrify helpless victims.” (Simpson 2000, 3-4). He, as well, claims that a person who has become a serial killer must have had a traumatic experience in the past in order for the viewer to be able to sympathise with him or her (Simpson 2000, 11). To conclude this part focusing on the theoretical background about serial killer, it can be said, based on this small of example of the study on serial killer fiction, that scholars seem to agree on the development of the fictional serial killer. The adult serial killer comes has a tragic story

of life and without the highly traumatising experiences as a child, he or she might not even be a serial killer. The serial killer is usually depicted as evil from the birth but as a victim of the circumstances.

If we think about heroes and serial killers, we tend to, understandably, consider those who catch the killers to be the heroes. It is only natural to think of the hero as a good guy and the serial killer as the bad guy. But is the difference actually quite that obvious? Maybe the distinction is not that black and white after all, and there might be a grey area in between them. The fictional American hero is an independent white male who is able to do what he must do, even if it requires taking the law into his own hands every once in a while.

This tradition of heroism that allows the hero to act even on the wrong side of the law has its origins in the classic Westerns. The hero must keep the settlement safe from the greedy landowners since the society's own law has been broken down or it might not even have been created yet. The hero must possess all the same qualities as the villain does, he must be able to solve problems with violence. His acts of violence are justified, as opposed to the villain's acts, because his intentions are good (Cawelti 2004, 176). This idea of the heroic vigilante is alive and well even today as there are constantly new television series and films being aired on television and cinema, such as television series *Arrow* (2012-) and *Dexter* (2006-2013).

As we are considering the aspects of the hero in the Westerns, we must think about the motivation behind his actions. He has got neither financial motivations nor social relationship factors motivating him, but he is a man who wants to do 'the right thing'. As Cawelti claims, "- he is obedient to an inner code of his own - "a man's

gotta do what a man's gotta do" – that happens to coincide with the needs of the community. - Because he is a superior man of violence, capable of purging whole bands of outlaws, the mythical lawman has to be a heroic outsider like the Lone Ranger." (Cawelti 2004, 176-177). This emphasizes the hero's Otherness, he is like us but in some ways he is completely different from us. He is capable of things we could not even imagine ourselves doing for the good the community but at the same time we would be forced to consider if we would want him as a part of our community for good.

As with serial killers, one key aspect of a hero is his otherness. As Mike Alsford says in his book *Heroes & Villains*, "[o]ne of the characteristics of the hero is what we might call their transcendental status" (Alsford 2006, 23). The hero is simultaneously one of us, the regular man we see every day going to work, shopping for groceries, doing regular chores, and someone who is nothing like us, seemingly coming from another planet. In this context the theory of Otherness can be used, as we can construct a juxtaposition of us as the regular people and them as the heroes. The Other is often scary to us, different from us and thus fascinating.

According to Alsford, in fiction, the hero constantly wants to belong and be a part of the world we live in, as opposed to the villain who seeks to isolate himself from the regular people, thus widening the gap between the society and himself (Alsford 2006, 29). This way the Other, the hero, seeks to become one of us. Heroes tend to have alter egos to protect their close ones from the villains. Take for example Superman and Spiderman. Superman's alter ego is Clark Kent, the nerdy newspaper journalist. Spiderman's alter ego is Peter Parker, the high school student who has been bitten by a mutant spider (Alsford 2006, 35-6). They both hold on to their alter egos in order to

blend in and have social relationships with the regular people. If they did reveal their true characters, not anybody would probably see them as the journalist and student they are, but as something highly unusual, something to look at in awe. As Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart state it in their article *The Hero as a Communication Phenomenon* (1994), “Heroes transcend ordinary human qualities embodying the divine, the ideal, the quest, the courageous, the virtuous, the superior.” (Drucker & Cathcart 1994, 1)

As Geraldine Harris claims in her article *A return to form? Postmasculinist television drama and tragic heroes in the wake of the Sopranos* (2012), “in Revenge Tragedy, the action often starts with the (anti-)hero gaining or already having systemic understanding of the prevailing evil and corruption and its sources.” The hero then seeks to make things right, even though his moral or ethical behaviour is broken (Harris 2012, 458). This applies to the heroes we see on television and film as the potential hero understands what is wrong with the world and decides to make it right, even though it might be against his own moral.

The Western world has its own ideal of moral and behaviour and we all are expected to act accordingly to the current standards. According to Allison Eden et al., the viewers evaluate the appropriateness of the heroes’ behaviour based on these standards in their article *Perceptions of Moral Violations and Personality Traits among Heroes and Villains* (2014): “As “appropriateness” is often situated within cultural norms, moral judgements in character perception can be considered a type of social judgement” (Eden et al. 2014, 188). The cultural norms of the society change tends to change over time and at the moment, in my opinion, the values of the world seem quite

tough and there is a certain “every man for himself” attitude in the air. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the antihero narratives and vigilante stories are so popular nowadays.

Heroes can also be seen ready to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Superheroes such as Spiderman, Superman and Batman set themselves at risk by resisting their enemies even though they know they might die themselves by doing so. This self-sacrificing is one of the aspects we consider heroic in a person. Sacrificing the self can be seen as one of the key reasons why the hero is usually a loner. He has got nothing to lose and no-one will miss him even if he dies during his endeavours. They also set themselves at the risk of suffering after they succeed in fighting their enemies. As Claire Sisco King says in her book *Male Sacrifice, Trauma and the Cinema* (2011), “So wounded is this victim-hero that he often bears the symptoms of trauma or what might be called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, nightmares and repetition compulsions due to prior experiences of extreme fear or loss.” (King 2011, 4).

There has been a shift in hero narratives in the field of popular culture and literature from the mythic, well-meaning hero to the antihero, who is able to do good but most often in terms of his or her own aspirations. It could be claimed that the antihero’s good deeds are a side product of his own endeavours. As Ann Larabee states in her editorial *The New Television Anti-Hero* (2013), “If these early stylizations [*Leave it to Beaver, I Love Lucy* etc.] of the modest middle-class lifestyle were gently comic reaffirmations of an alleged national character, the new television narratives speak of fragmentation, desperation and violence of tragic, atomized figures whose only meaning

lies in narcissistic projects.” (Larabee 2013, 1131). The viewers are clearly looking for something more complex than merely the division of good guys and bad guys and we enjoy the narratives that discuss humans as more complicated figures. After all, hardly anyone is absolutely good or absolutely bad. Daniel M. Shafer and Arthur A. Raney discuss how we enjoy these narratives in their article *Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives* (2012). In their study, they discovered that in order for the viewer to enjoy the antihero narrative, the story scheme must develop and evolve over time (Shafer & Raney 2012, 1028).

It is interesting to wonder about the popularity of the antihero narratives, as it was stated before in this section. Shadi Neimneh sees it in his article *The Anti-Hero in Modernist Fiction* (2013) as an opportunity to redeem the honesty and humanity in these times of dehumanizing machine age (Neimneh 2013, 78). But can honesty and humanity be restored by antiheroes who look for their own good, even if they do manage to help others while doing it? Is it not just underlining the “every man for himself” mentality that was discussed earlier? These are questions that cannot be answered in this thesis, but they do make me wonder about the situation we live in. It can be said that popular culture reflects on our thoughts and morality, and there is a reason for why these antihero narratives and vigilante stories are so popular. As Mike Chopra-Gant argues in his article *The Law of the Father, the Law of the Land: Power, Gender and Race in The Shield* (2007), it is the conflict between the law and moral principle, as well as the idea of “natural justice” that represents the white patriarchal power on the other (Chopra-Gant 2007, 668). The antihero acts on his own moral justice, not caring for the law or the common moral, and therefore has received such a popular status in popular culture and its consumers.

Christopher N. Poulos discusses his own experiences in his article *The Liminal Hero* (2012), as he one day in his youth discovered he was rooting for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid as opposed to the good guy chasing them, even though they were clearly the bad guys. He speaks of the liminal hero, who is an outsider, a loner who rides in from somewhere else. He is seen as the antihero who acts from his own principles and simultaneously is in possession of the qualities normally attached to the classical hero. As he wonderfully captivates it, “He lives on the border, between town and wilderness, between civilized and uncivilized, between compassionate and ruthless, between good and evil.” (Poulos 2012, 486-487).

These previously mentioned studies and theories in mind, we can now begin to analyse the series itself. As it was stated in the beginning of this second subsection, some of the theoretical aspects will be taken into account only in the analysis section, as they have been written about the television show *Dexter*.

### 3 Analyzing *Dexter*

This section of the thesis attempts to analyse *Dexter* from the viewpoint of masculinity and heroism. Dexter Morgan is a complicated character with many sides to his story. Is he a sadistic slaughterer or a concerned citizen or a superhero or maybe all of these? Five episodes from different seasons of the television series are analysed in this section focusing on the masculinity and heroism of the protagonist. The main questions are whether Dexter is a modern masculine man who takes care of his family but is still a manly man or a serial killer who is just “keeping up with the Jones’s” with his almost too perfect outer façade. This section also discusses Dexter’s possible heroism and how it is presented in the series. The section consists of this main section and two subsections that discuss the masculinity and heroism more profoundly. The first part of this section aims to discuss Dexter and other characters of the series in order to make the reader understand more about them and their relationships with each other.

*Dexter* is a very graphic series where the skies are blue and blood is ruby red. Dexter’s killings are shown without saving the viewer from seeing the cutting of the victims’ cheeks for a blood sample or pools of blood after the killing is complete. The opening credits of the series are also very graphic even though all we see is Dexter getting ready for the day. He wakes up, washes up, gets dressed and eats breakfast. All of these regular morning activities are shown to us close up, we see Dexter chewing on his bacon from such a minuscule distance that is almost macabre. The purpose of the opening credits is probably to prepare the viewer for what is about to follow. Looking from a wider perspective, in a way it also shows Dexter putting on his disguise of a

“normal person” by doing all the things the regular, non-serial killer, people do in the mornings.

Dexter is the narrator of the series. He talks about his thoughts and his feelings quite openly. There are, however, some things that he does not discuss but leaves a puzzle to the viewer to solve. He is pragmatic about himself, he has accepted himself as he is, apparently mostly because he cannot change himself. He has decided to channel his murderous emotions towards killing the people the law cannot judge. The reason for this is his father and he as well as the influence he has made to his son will be discussed later on in this section.

In the beginning of the pilot Dexter talks about the city as he is looking for his next victim. Dexter’s Miami is a sunny city with dark secrets behind the sunshine. His victim is Mike Donovan, who has been molesting young boys and then killing them. Dexter takes Donovan to the location where he has killed the boys. Dexter has displayed the corpses of the boys and he forces Donovan to look at the boys. Donovan tries to plea to Dexter as another killer but Dexter answers that he does not kill children because he has standards. He then ties Donovan to a table with plastic, cuts his cheek to get a memorabilia in the form of a blood sample and then strangles him to death. Dexter sees the world as a better place now without Donovan. The first few minutes of the series reveal to the viewer why Dexter kills, he wants to make the world a better place and that can be done by “taking out the garbage”.

In the first episode Dexter says

“I don’t know what made me the way I am,  
but whatever it was left a hollow place inside

me. People fake a lot of human interactions,  
but I feel like I fake them all and I fake them  
very well. - And that's my burden, I guess."  
(s. 1, e. 1).

It seems like Dexter suffers from blending in to the crowd from time to time and finds it hard to have social relations with people he does not actually care about. As far as masculinity is concerned, Dexter can be thought of as a masculine man who does not show his emotions. But does he even have emotions? In the first episode he claims that he does not have them.

Dexter speaks about his sister Debra in relation to his lack of emotions. He says "I don't have feelings at all, but if I did, I might have them for Debra." (s. 1, e. 1). Debra is also socially challenged, she has problems with intimacy and she tries very hard to be one the guys, making her quite a masculine character. Her masculinity will be discussed later on this section, as well. Debra works at the Miami Metro Police Department, as does Dexter. In the first episode she is working in undercover duties pretending to be a prostitute. She is working on a case where prostitutes are gone missing and later on found dead, drained of all blood. The killer is on the loose and everyone is terrified, except for Dexter. He finds the killer's actions marvellous and he admires the way they have been drained and cut into neat pieces. Dexter is not capable to the emotions the Western culture considers human, but he is capable of admiring a "colleagues" work in murdering.

Later on in the first season, it is revealed that the murderer, who is named "The Ice Truck Killer" after the way he preserves the bodies, is actually Dexter's big

brother. They were separated as small children when their mother was brutally murdered. Harry Morgan then adopted Dexter but did not want to take his brother, too. It seemed like Harry Morgan saw the evil in Dexter's brother's eyes and therefore did not want him into his family, but with Dexter, he thought he was still innocent and little enough to be saved. It is clear that seeing their mother being murdered influenced dramatically on both boys. If Harry had not adopted Dexter, he might have been on the same path as his big brother and killing innocent people.

The first episode presents Dexter's ability to act the average Joe. His co-workers like him, he always has something nice to say and he brings doughnuts to work. These simple things make him a good guy who almost everybody likes. The only person suspecting something is Sergeant James Doakes, who says "You give me the fucking creeps, you know that Dexter?" (s. 1, e. 1) and tries to make Dexter upset with his intensive stare. "Yeah, I know. Sorry about that", Dexter replies. Dexter's mask does not fade, he knows he needs to be careful around Doakes, but he also knows he has nothing to fear as he has been meticulous in covering his tracks.

Dexter's place of work offers him the best position imaginable to find victims. He is a blood spatter expert and has access to all the files in the police department. He has made friends with the lady in the police department archives and goes to speak to her whenever he needs to find new victims. Dexter explains that he wants to read about the crimes committed in the area. The lady says to Dexter "You have a morbid sense of fun" (s. 1, e. 1) she unknowingly helps Dexter to kill again. Finding real criminals to kill is a part of the Code of Harry that Dexter follows. The Code of Harry will be discussed more in subsection 3.3.

Dexter sees himself as a lone rider, a lonely wolf among the crowd. He looks at the doughnut box that he brought to work “Just like me. Empty inside.” (s. 1, e. 1) He constantly observes the people around him, imitating their actions and the emotions they show. He is socially awkward, but in a way other people cannot see. He is a good actor, the wolf dressed as a sheep. Dexter has the perfect cover story, he works for the police, everybody likes him, he has friends and he has a girlfriend. Dexter has found the perfect girl for him because “Rita is in her own way as damaged as me” (s. 1, e. 1).

Rita is a mother of two children and later on she and Dexter have a son together. She has been traumatized in her previous marriage with an abusive drug addict and has big problems with intimacy. This suits Dexter, “I don’t understand sex - - the act itself seems so... undignified.” (s. 1, e. 1). When they are returning home from a date, where Dexter saw the work of the Ice Truck Killer for the second time, Dexter thinks about the perfectly drained, cut and displayed corpse of a woman, Dexter gets somehow excited. It is not clear whether or not he is actually turned on by the idea or otherwise excited, but he squeezes Rita’s thigh. Rita automatically interprets this as Dexter being sexually aroused and utters “I’m not ready” (s. 1, e. 1) and gets out of the car. Dexter is being left alone and confused, he does not understand what just happened. Dexter cannot imagine that Rita could misinterpret his signals since he does not understand that he is sending any.

This is a good example of Dexter’s lack of social skills and furthermore, lack of understanding of communication between people. There are two ways one can interpret the situation mentioned above, Rita’s way and Dexter’s way. Rita’s way

follows the conventional pattern of thinking about dates; they had a nice night together, dinner, talking, walking hand in hand. It does not matter that Dexter left her for a while to check out a crime scene, they still had a nice night. When Dexter is taking her home, he seems preoccupied by his thoughts and when they pull over at Rita's house and Dexter squeezes her thigh, she automatically assumes that Dexter wants to have sex with her.

From Dexter's perspective, they did have a nice night and he was lucky to be close to the latest crime scene where he got to see the perfectly murdered woman. He considers the drained and cut body a masterpiece, a work of art. Even though he is on a date with Rita, his focus is on the dead body. He keeps thinking about it, admiring it, savouring it all through the night and he gets so excited about it that Rita interprets it as sexual arousal. Knowing Dexter's thoughts, the viewer sees the squeezing of the thigh more as an act of aggression or violence than sexual, as does Dexter.

Later on in the episode, Rita calls Dexter as he cleaning up after a murder. Dexter is meticulous in covering the place where he kills to minimize the risk of getting caught. He covers the space with plastic in a way that ensures no blood spatters will be found in the premises. Dexter answers the phone and manages to sound normal even though only a bit earlier he has been killing a man and cutting him up in pieces small enough to fit a garbage bag. Rita has not got any clue about Dexter's extra-curricular activities. Rita invites Dexter over because her children are at a sleepover at the neighbour. After their date night, Rita thinks that Dexter wants to have sex with her but as it turns out to the viewer, Dexter is relieved when Rita's son calls and wants to come home. Dexter's intimacy issues diminish during the series and he does have sex with

women but all in all, sex does not seem to play an important part in Dexter's life. He does not get sexually aroused by killing, his murderous desires are completely directed towards the blood and the taking of less than innocent lives.

Dexter explains his relationship with death:

“Most people have a hard time dealing with death. But I'm not most people. It's the grief that makes me uncomfortable. Not because I'm a killer, really I just don't understand all that emotion, which makes it tough to fake.” (s. 1, e.3)

Dexter does not feel sad when someone dies, it is the entire concept of grieving that he cannot relate to. In the early episodes of the series Dexter does not care about anyone else and he claims not have human emotions. Later on, as Dexter starts a family with Rita, he begins to develop feelings towards his close ones. He wants to protect them and that way he is represented as a traditional masculine man. In episode three of the first season, Dexter still has a hard time handling his social relations. “Many times in my life I feel like I'm missing some essential pieces of the human puzzle.” (s. 1, e. 3)

In the third episode discussed in this thesis, episode 10 of season 2, Sergeant James Doakes discovers what Dexter does after office hours. Dexter captures Doakes and holds him prisoner in a cabin in the middle of the woods. They have conversations about Dexter's killings and what motivates him and how can he justify them. They also discuss Doakes' killings and why he thinks he is more justified to kill than Dexter. These topics will be discussed more thoroughly in subsection 3.2. Dexter

proves to Doakes that anyone who could harm him gets killed as Dexter understands he has more to lose than just his freedom.

In episode 4 of the third season, Dexter has made a new friend who is intrigued by Dexter's "hobby". This friend is an influential man Miguel Prado, Assistant District Attorney. Through him Dexter could get his hands on many criminals, as Prado would like them to be partners in crime. They both seem to have the same objective, keeping the city clean from the criminals, but their motivations and means are rather different. Dexter does not know how to deal with this new friend and is more or less irritated by Prado's attempts to bond with him. This setting is discussed more in subsection 3.2.

### 3.1 Variety of Masculinities in *Dexter*

There are several different types of masculinities present in the series and some of them will be discussed in this subsection. Some main characters of the series will be discussed more thoroughly, such as Dexter, Debra, Dexter's colleague Angel Batista and Miguel Prado. They represent different types of masculinities and will be examined more closely.

Dexter is a white Western man. He lives by his own moral code and can be considered as a Lone Rider of our time. He has social relations that are, however, limited and serve only his own needs. He seemingly follows the rules of the society but still has a deep dark secret he does not want to reveal to anyone. From the viewpoint of

an outsider, Dexter is just the ordinary man next door who does the things society expects of him, he goes to work every morning, takes care of his health, has a family and friends. In a way, Dexter is the modern cowboy who protects the frontier from the criminals, albeit his means to an end are questionable.

Our modern Western world demands quite a lot from men. They should be masculine but sensitive at the same time. They still should not be too sensitive, as that is considered a feminine feature. However, they should be the protectors of the family, the breadwinners but still they should be at home taking care of the household chores as much as women do, preferably even more. This is a somewhat exaggerated view but it has some truth to it anyway. Even Dexter struggles with these expectations alongside with his Dark Passenger who urges him to kill.

Dexter's relationship with Rita develops from dating into marriage with children and at the same Dexter's masculinity changes. His emotionless and tough core begins to, if not crumble, at least soften. In the pilot episode, he tells the viewer that he has no emotions and no soul, he is only a serial killer with a code. As the series develops further, Dexter realises that if he gets caught, other people will suffer too. At that point, it might be sensible for Dexter to give up on the family and friends, keep on killing and care only about himself. However, Dexter wants to eat the cake and keep it.

There are certain qualities considered as masculine and Dexter has most of them. He is fit, organised, strong, both physically and mentally, and he takes care of his own business, both at work and out of work. When discussing masculine features in a more profound level, Dexter possesses those qualities, as well. He is white, straight and

middle-class and very ordinary, in such a way that he does not draw attention to himself. He blends in so well that no one can suspect him of his dark deeds.

Dexter cuts his victims in order to obtain their blood samples as a memorabilia. He keeps them in a box inside an air-conditioner in his apartment and when he looks at them, he remembers each killing and each victim. Later on in the series, he uses them in getting away with his murders. After he has captured Sergeant Doakes into a cabin in the Everglades, he plants them into his car. They are discovered there and Doakes is blamed for all the murders. After the police have analysed the samples, they discover that all the victims have been killers themselves and Dexter gets a reputation as the Dark Defender. This will be discussed further in subsection 3.2, as it has more to do with the hero aspect of the thesis than of the masculinity of Dexter. It is still important to mention it here as well, mostly because Dexter's organisational skills are a part of his masculine features.

Dexter is meticulous in his work, both at the police force and his work after hours. Organisational skills and rational thinking are both considered masculine features as men are stereotypically expected to be more rational than women in our Western culture. Stereotypes tend to affect the way people see the world and it is crucial to break the stereotypes in order for us to change the pattern of thinking. When Dexter Morgan is in question, he is breaking the stereotype with his own behaviour by allowing the events in his life change him as a person.

For example, when we discuss his relationship with Rita, we need to think about the path they walk together. In a nutshell, their path begins from very different viewpoints. Dexter considers his relationship with Rita as a perfect cover story for his

dark secret. On the inside, he considers himself as loner who does not love nor need anyone but on the outside he goes on dates with Rita and allows their relationship progress into something he could never have imagined. Rita's perspective is that she wants to find someone she can trust after her catastrophic marriage to the abusive drug addict Paul. She sees Dexter as an ordinary man who can keep her safe and provide a stable surrounding for her children. Rita's viewpoint is much more conventional than Dexter's, obviously, and she has not got any idea about her actual role in Dexter's life.

As it was observed in the theoretical part of this thesis in the quote from Rosalind Miles, a "normal" masculine man requires a family. A masculine man is the head of his family, being the main breadwinner and the one who makes the decisions. Dexter and Rita's relationship advances and Dexter proposes to Rita, mainly because it is what he supposes he should do. Before their marriage, however, Dexter has a relationship with Lila, a dramatic British woman, a passionate artist. He meets her in Narcotics Anonymous meeting, where Rita has forced him to go to. The reason for this is that Rita finds out Dexter has something he is keeping as a secret. Dexter lies to her that he has had a drug addiction before they met each other and he is a recovering drug addict. Rita does not want to face the same problems she had with her ex-husband and therefore insists that Dexter goes to NA meetings. Lila fascinates Dexter for she is wild, dangerous and tempting, something completely different from Rita.

They end up having an affair that is passionate and dangerous, and Dexter even talks about his Dark Passenger to Lila. Lila accepts him for who he is and for a while Dexter wonders about a life with her, without having to hide his true nature. Even though this thought is tempting, Dexter decides to stay with Rita as he wants to be loyal

to her. He ends the relationship with Lila. Lila does not accept this and later on has an affair with Angel Batista, this way ensuring she can stay close to Dexter. Ultimately, Lila moves back to Europe and Dexter decides she is a risk to him and kills her, as well. It can be seen as a masculine way to protect himself and his family, he cannot live in fear of Lila telling everyone who he really is. He takes matters into own hands once again.

“I’ve been selfish, only thinking about what happens to me. - If I was ever caught, Rita and the kids would suffer.” (e.10 s.2)

Dexter begins to break the myth of the solitary man. He understands the consequences of his actions and what it might do the people close to him if he ever got caught. He wonders what it might do to Debra, the one person he says he might have feelings for in the pilot episode. Dexter suspects that Debra “would explode” if she ever found out (s.1, e.1). His emotional development has begun and it is interesting to watch his growing fondness to other people. It would be fascinating to study his emotional growth from the cold blooded murderer into the loving father and man that he becomes, but that would be a topic for an entirely new study.

In season three, Rita is pregnant with their son. Dexter thinks “he’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do” and proposes to Rita. In episode four of season three, Dexter proposes to her for the first time while she is vomiting in the bathroom. This is not the most romantic proposal and Rita declines, she does not want marry Dexter if he only proposes to her because he thinks it is what he should do. Dexter is emotionally lost, he thinks about his motives in having a family with Rita:

“Family man. Husband and father. Sounds so upstanding, harmless. Much better than lives alone, keeps to himself.” (s.3, e.4)

He wants to marry Rita, but does not know how to convince her for his love, especially because he does not even feel it:

“How do you show someone real love when you don’t even know what it feels like?” (s.3, e.4)

In fact, Dexter calls himself an emotional vegetable because of his lack of those emotions we tend to call human.

In the same episode, Dexter and the police he works with examine the killing of a young man. His girlfriend has found him dead in their living room. As Dexter watches her and listens to her while she talks to the police, he observes the woman and her grief and makes mental notes:

“That is what love looks like. And loss. I’m not sure I can do that.” (s.3, e.4)

At the end of the episode, the police find out the girlfriend is actually the killer and she has taken the life of the young man out of pure jealousy. They had been dating for a while and the man had left her. She had decided to kill him, thus not allowing him to be anyone else, either. While she talks about her love to the man as she confesses the murder, Dexter knows exactly what he must say to Rita to convince her of his non-existing love for her. Dexter’s morbid relationship to others is quite clear in that scene,

as he actually proposes to Rita with the words of another murdered. Dexter plays a role in a very reassuring way.

Dexter says he has always been good at role play. He claims that all his life he has been playing the role of the villain and not the good guy. He also speaks about his relationship to other people: “The insider, that’s the role I’ve always been good at” (s. 3, e. 4). As it was mentioned before, he is well liked in his community and almost everyone likes him. He presents himself as the nice man who everyone can like, thus he is breaking the tough guy masculinity. He plays a double role in his life, being a ruthless killer on the inside and a good guy on the outside. One role he has to adapt to is the role of a father as his son Harrison is born.

Dexter finds feelings inside him for his son and he wants to raise him up as Harry raised him. There is one difference however, Dexter does not want Harrison to become a killer as his father. One of the most heart breaking scenes of the series is in the final episode of season four. In season four, Dexter has been hunting down the serial killer called Trinity. Trinity reminds Dexter of himself, he seems to be the average Joe next door with a job and a family, but he keeps on killing innocent people in series of three, hence the name Trinity. They also differ as Trinity is abusive to his family, as well. Dexter does catch him in the final episode and kills him, but when he goes home, he finds out that Trinity got there before him. Rita is lying in the bathtub in her own blood and Harrison is sitting on the floor in a pool of blood. The setting is the same as it was when Harry found Dexter next to his dead mother. This makes Dexter fear for his son’s future as a potential serial killer. Trinity will be analysed with more detail in

subsection 3.3, as it is vital in observing the reasons of why a person becomes a serial killer.

It is fascinating to see the change from the “emotional vegetable” to the caring husband and father. Sure enough, Dexter is not the conventional father for his family and certainly not the conventional husband, but he does develop feelings that seem strange to him, as well. Modern masculinity accepts this softer side in a man, as it does other features as well. As the time and world change, the idea of hegemonic masculinity changes too. Simultaneously, as the world grows colder and meaner, to put it roughly, the image of man becomes softer and more diverse. This can be seen in Dexter, as well. He is still heterosexual, strong, fit, goal-oriented and tough but at the same time he develops a softer side with the urge to keep his family safe.

Rationality is often considered to be a characteristic of a masculine man, as opposed to sentimentality as feminine feature. As Dexter is keeping Doakes as prisoner in the cabin in the Everglades in episode 10 of season 2, he ponders whether he himself or James Doakes should be killed. He contemplates the thought from various different aspects as he tries to evaluate which one of them is more valuable as a human being. He thinks about their value to the society and decides they are equally valuable, as Doakes is a member of the police force and has been serving his country in the military and Dexter himself helps to solve crimes as a blood spatter analyst, and also “takes out the trash” by killing those the law cannot catch. But when he comes down to the social value they possess, he wonders about the people around them. Dexter comes to the conclusion, that the only people who would miss Doakes are his mother and sisters, as opposed to Dexter, who has Rita and her children, his sister Debra and those

who consider themselves as his friends, Angel and Vince Masuka. He decides that Doakes is the one who deserves to die more than the other, and his evaluation has been meticulously pondered and calculated. As a matter of fact, Dexter does not get to kill Doakes, since the femme fatal Lila decides to help Dexter by blowing up the cabin Dexter is holding Doakes as prisoner. Therefore, Dexter avoids the breaking of his moral code by killing an innocent victim.

As it was mentioned earlier, there are different types of masculinities in the series besides the white male masculinity that Dexter himself tries to perform as the average American man. One of the masculinities present in the series is detective Angel Batista's Latino masculinity. As Isabel Santalauria notes, "Angel Batista evolves from a happy divorcee and womaniser extraordinaire in first and second seasons to become a sensible man in love with Barbara Gianni in the third season and husband of Maria LaGuerta in the fourth season." (Santalauria 2010, 64). Batista is depicted as a Latin lover who divorces from his wife in the beginning of the first season and from then on trying to find a woman who would stay by his side. He is also presented as the loving father of Auri, who stays with Batista's ex-wife after the divorce.

Batista can be seen as somewhat goofy character in his hat, Hawaii shirt and sad eyes, as he is constantly looking for love, even if he must pay for it. He meets Barbara Gianna as he is looking for a prostitute to satisfy his needs of intimacy. Gianna is an undercover police officer posing as a prostitute in order to catch men buying sexual favours. She reveals her true identity to Batista as she does not want to arrest him. Batista is instantly intrigued by her and wants to meet her again after the incident. They do end up having a relationship but they end it in season three. More than sex,

Batista seems to long for love and affection. He is not the macho man that Latin men are often seen as, instead he is kind and caring. He falls for the trap Lila sets him after Dexter leaves her. Batista does anything Lila asks of him without ever realizing that Lila is only using him to get closer to Dexter once again. There is, however, also a violent side to Batista. As Santalauria claims, “Angel’s virility, la pasión, is never in question but his violent instincts have to be contained. When Detective Barbara Gianna is the victim of aggression, Angel’s first impulse is to locate the aggressor and beat him up.” (Santalauria 2010, 64.) As opposed to the traditional Latin temper and masculinity we see on television, Batista constrains his first reaction and arrests the aggressor in order for the court to judge him instead of himself.

In season four, Angel Batista is in a relationship with Lieutenant Maria LaGuerta, who is the chief of the department where Dexter, Debra and Batista himself work in the Miami Metro Police Department. Batista clearly suffers from the situation they are in, LaGuerta as the chief and Batista as the subordinate. Batista, however, insists that it is not true and he is more than happy that his partner has achieved her position. As the season advances, their relationship begins to suffer from the situation. This is apparently quite usual in Hispanic families according to Michael S. Kimmel and Michael A. Messner:

“Hispanic men and women both insist that Latin machismo and the importance of family are often misunderstood by Anglos, but their more accurate versions still emphasize the traditional importance of the father and the confinement of the mother to the home, even if she demonstrates real strength there.

- A Hispanic woman who achieves an income or occupational level higher than her husband's arouses more agony in her spouse than occurs in any other ethnic group." (Kimmel & Messner 1989, 65)

Whether or not the reason is this agony of LaGuerta's higher status, Batista and LaGuerta decide to end their relationship. Batista has, yet again, failed to hold on to a relationship where he could feel like the man of the house.

As opposed to Angel Batista's sentimentality and passion, there is the other Latin masculine man who requires some attention. Miguel Prado, the District Attorney in Miami is a ruthless man who also disguises himself as a family man with a high moral. The truth is that he has one brother who is a drug dealer Dexter kills and his other brother is a drunkard police officer. Miguel Prado is more than ready to engage in extra-marital affairs and illegal deeds if they work for his own benefit. He is the traditional Hispanic head of the household who has a large income and a wife who stays at home, taking care of the family. Prado is masculine man who takes what he wants without asking for it.

Prado discovers Dexter's Dark Passenger and opposed to what he should do, he suggests they become partners in crime. Prado calls Dexter his brother and wants to be close to him constantly by calling him and inquiring about every aspect of Dexter's life. Dexter does not appreciate Prado's close relationship to him, instead he feels as if he has been trapped into a corner with only one way out. Prado ends up on Dexter's table and meets his end in the hands of the serial killer he mistook as a friend. Dexter tells Prado that he works alone.

In addition to the masculinities mentioned above, there is also feminine masculinity present in the series, very strongly as a matter of fact. As Judith Halberstam states in her article *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Men, Women and Masculinity* (2002),

“Female masculinity,...,disrupts contemporary cultural studies accounts of masculinity within which masculinity always boils down to the social, cultural and political effects of male embodiment and male privilege. Such accounts can only read masculinity as the powerful and active alternative to female passivity and as the expression therefore of white male subjectivities.” (Halberstam 2002, 345.)

In *Dexter*, there are different types of females that can roughly be categorized as passive and active and therefore divided into masculine women and feminine women. Even though is it not entirely correct to make such division based on a rather small data, it is done in this thesis in order to simplify the division of what are considered feminine features and masculine features in our western culture.

Halberstam seeks to create interventions in the traditional gender theory by using the term female masculinity. Her goal is to refuse the authentication of masculinity only through maleness, detach misogyny from masculinity, challenge the compulsory heterosexuality and force us to consider male femininities, as well (Halberstam 2002, 345). It is not possible to discuss all of these matters in terms of this thesis, but it would certainly be interesting to look at the male femininities in the series,

if in fact, they do exist. *Dexter* is a highly masculine series with traditional gender roles, but a closer study of the characters from this viewpoint might lead to interesting results.

Masculinity, as well as female masculinity, have been connected with sexuality for a long time and a masculine female has been automatically been thought of as lesbian. “The dilemma of the masculine and therefore ugly woman functions as the spectre that haunts feminine identification in order to ensure that few women cathect onto female masculinity through either identification or desire” (Halberstam 2002, 359). As, however, the three women who are discussed in this thesis the most are neither lesbian nor ugly, I must focus on their behaviour. Halberstam often links butch looks and masculinity together in her studies but as we are discussing *Dexter*, it cannot be done.

Dexter’s foster sister Debra Morgan is a woman with a foul mouth and masculine manners. She rarely speaks out sentences without swearing and is happy to engage in conversations with his male colleagues about sports and such. She rarely speaks about her feelings and uses men mostly for her sexual needs. At the same time, she hopes to find a relationship in which she could be respected and loved for who she is. She has always wanted to be a police officer and her cover up role as a prostitute does not satisfy her professionally. She knows she has much more to offer for the police force that just standing around in street corners with prostitutes. She is constantly undermined by her boss, Maria LaGuerta, who does not consider her as a particularly good law enforcer due to her age and probably her looks.

Debra is not masculine in her appearance, she is a beautiful woman who attracts the attention of men and it is easy for her to find boyfriends. At the same time

she is not comfortable with starting relationships as it would mean she would have to trust a man. The only man she feels she can rely after her father's passing away is her brother Dexter. Ironically, or perhaps tragically, Dexter claims to have no emotions towards anyone, but as it was mentioned before in this thesis, if he did, we would have them for Debra.

Debra's first real relationship ends tragically as she discovers her new boyfriend Rudy is actually the Ice Truck Killer, who is also Dexter's biological brother Brian. Dexter saves Debra from the Ice Truck Killer's hands and that is where their paths are close to being reunited. As Brian is lying on Dexter's kill table, he suggests Dexter that they should continue their ventures together and keep on killing as a pair of brothers. Dexter contemplates on the suggestion, feeling tempted to take upon his offer. Brian pleads to Dexter, putting his non-existing, as Dexter claims, feelings to Debra against the loyalty towards his own brother. Dexter, however, decides to kill Brian instead, therefore choosing his side for good. Dexter seems to be the only man Debra can trust.

Later on in season four, where the police force is looking for Trinity, Debra falls in love with FBI agent Frank Lundy. With Lundy Debra finds the love and acceptance she is so desperately looking for but their relationship ends catastrophically as Lundy is killed by Trinity. All through her childhood Debra was looking for acceptance from his father, who always seemed preoccupied with Dexter and his training. It was one of the reasons why Debra herself joined the police force, she wanted to make her father proud. This may be a cliché, but in this case it is true. In Lundy

Debra found what she had been trying to find all her life, an older man who could love her unconditionally for who she is.

The inability to discuss her feelings leads Debra constantly to fail in her relationships to the opposite sex. A good example of Debra's incapability to express her emotions happens when she is lying in a hospital bed after the shooting that killed Lundy and wounded her. Dexter comes to see her and asks her how she is and the only thing she says is "I'm fine" (s. 4, e. 5), even though the man she loves has only recently died in front of her very eyes. Debra can be considered as a heterosexual white woman who is masculine in her behaviour but not her appearance.

Another woman in the series who seems to possess some masculine features is Lieutenant Maria LaGuerta. Her work seems to be the most important aspect of life for her and she can be quite ruthless in getting where she wants to be. Her goal is to climb the career ladder and she succeeds in that, as well. Her personal relationship with Angel Batista ends because of the status she has reached and that causes conflicts between the two former lovers. LaGuerta does not sympathise other women in the police force, instead she seems to consider them as personal threats to her.

As the police are trying to find the killer in the first season, Debra invents a theory with Dexter about how the killer has managed to keep the dead bodies in such a good shape in the burning heat of Miami. Their theory includes an ice truck in which the killer could easily move the bodies around without anyone suspecting him and keeping them frozen in order to preserve them. When Debra presents their theory to LaGuerta, she frowns and suggests that Debra should go back to patrolling street corners with the prostitutes. As soon as Dexter points out to LaGuerta that the theory

might as well be true, she accepts it and commands everyone to look for any missing ice trucks. This is a good example of LaGuerta feeling threatened by Debra, and later on in the series it takes a long while for LaGuerta to accept that there might other competent female police officers besides her in the force.

The complete opposite to these two strong, masculine females is Rita, Dexter's girlfriend and, later on, wife. She is a delicate woman, who has been traumatized by her ex-husband badly enough to keep her from trusting any man. All she wants is to find someone who will take care of her and her children and be kind to her. As her relationship to Dexter progresses, she becomes Debra's sister-in-law. They try to become friends but they never actually get close to one another, mainly because they are so different. Rita is very open and honest about her emotions and she is hoping that Debra would be, too. However, the delicateness of Rita is not something that Debra can relate to and their relationship remains friendly but distant.

### 3.2 Dexter as a Serial Killer, Hero and Antihero

As it was stated in the theoretical section, in our Western world, there are certain qualities a hero must possess in order to be called a hero. He must take care of his fellow humans, value life, be a loner and someone the regular people can look up to. We also discovered that serial killers are merciless, pleasure seeking monsters with horrific and traumatizing pasts. This subsection attempts to analyse how Dexter Morgan fits in to these categories and whether or not we can call him a hero. This subsection begins

with discussing Dexter as a serial killer and then continues to ponder whether he can be considered as a hero. In the final part of this subsection I wonder, with the help of scholars, why Dexter is so popular and why we love a serial killing monster.

As it the theoretical part of thesis shows, a serial killer often has a past that is terrible and scarring. Dexter Morgan's path down serial killer lane began when he was only three years old. His mother was not the prime of the society as she socialised with drug dealers and was a drug addict herself. She was also a police informant and had a secret relationship with Harry Morgan, Dexter's soon-to-be adoptive father. Dexter's biological father was Joe Driscoll, who only appeared once in the series and Dexter did not know him until he found out that he had died and left him all of his earthly possessions.

The events that took place in a shipping container when Dexter was three years old started the chain of events that made him who he is, the serial killer par excellence. Laura Moser's drug dealers found out that she was working in cooperation with the police force and they killed her very brutally in the container, disembodding her with a chainsaw while her two sons, Dexter and Brian were watching. According to David Buchbinder and Ann Elisabeth McGuire in *Homme Fatal: Illegitimate Pleasures in Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2013), this proves the pathology of the origins of the serial killer as both brothers became serial killers after being trapped in their mother's blood (Buchbinder & McGuire 2013, 228).

After the police find the boys with their dead mother, their paths are divided, although it is discovered during the course of the first season that the paths are, in a way, quite similar. Officer Harry Morgan picks up the little brother, Dexter from

the pool of blood where he is sitting. Dexter later on claims that in that pool of blood he was reborn as a serial killer. Officer Morgan rationalises that Brian as the older brother has understood too much of the terrible events that took place in the container and he cannot be saved, as opposed to Dexter who is only a little boy and can forget everything about it.

Dexter does fulfil the characters of a serial killer discussed in the theoretical section of the thesis. He kills for his own pleasure, hunts his victims down and violates their bodies after he has killed them by dismembering them into pieces that fit into garbage bags. However, his method of choosing his victims differs quite a lot from the “regular” serial killers. Dexter has standards, as he says to his first victim in the series, Mike Donovan. He only kills those who have done harm to others and the law enforcement is unable to track down.

As he was growing up, his killing urge began to take a hold of him. He started to kill small animals in the forest nearby and after a while, as a teenager, he killed the Morgan’s neighbour’s dog because it was constantly barking. Harry found the body of the dead dog in a shallow grave along with the other small animals. That is when Harry discovered Dexter’s dark side and confronted him about it. Dexter told Harry that he cannot help it, and he must kill to silence the voice inside him. Harry had two options, either he could go with the inevitable and support his son in his endeavours but try to guide him into a path more suitable or tell him not to perform acts like that and drive him away, thus making him into something he would have to chase a police officer. He chose to train his son in to a serial killer with a moral code, thus ensuring that Dexter’s actions would not harm those who did not deserve it. By doing so, Harry

Morgan decided to play God, giving his son the right to judge who can live and who must die.

As a young boy, Dexter is supposed to tell his parents every time he gets an urge to kill. Harry wants to find a way to use Dexter's killing urge for good and that is how he invents the Code of Harry. The Code has several points to be in to account, but the most important ones are a) never get caught and b) never kill an innocent. The idea behind the Code is noble and grand but in the end, as it turns out, it is actually too much for Harry. This will be discussed later on in the thesis.

It is shown in the pilot episode how Harry tells Dexter he is loved and his is not alone. The first rule of the Code, don't get caught, is ensured by Dexter's meticulous preparation for his kills. He chooses the victim by using the information he obtains from his colleagues at work, follows him around to discover his daily routines, prepares the killing room by covering it with plastic and duct tape and sets his killing tools by the killing table. He often also posts images of his victim's victims in order for him or her to watch at their very last moment. When the time of the kill approaches, Dexter fills his syringe, and back-up syringe, with sedative and sets out to wait. As he gets close enough, he usually injects the victim with the sedative and takes him or her to the kill room. Every time he touches the victim, he is wearing his gloves in order to avoid leaving finger prints into the body and thus minimizing the risk of getting caught.

In the kill room, he sets his victim on the table, ties him or her down with duct tape and waits for the moment he or she wakes up. After the victim is awake, Dexter takes a small scalpel and cuts the victim's cheek to get a blood sample. This sample he carefully sets in to a box full of other sample glasses which he hides in the air

conditioner of his apartment. He then confronts his victim about his or her crimes against the innocent people. Usually Dexter's victims are child molesters, drug dealers or killers. After they have spoken for a while, the victim in a state of panic and realisation that he or she is about to die, Dexter picks up his knife and kills. After the deed is done, Dexter carefully cuts the victim in to pieces, puts the pieces into garbage bags and cleans the kill room and no one will ever know of the horrible act committed there. After the cleaning, Dexter drives into the marina, gets on his boat and sails to the site where he dumps the pieces of the victim. He then sails back home, the sea breeze playing with his hair and without a care in the world, feeling satisfied and happy, on his boat named Slice of Life.

The purpose of this close description of Dexter's killing is to illustrate how careful and meticulous he is in his actions. This is a part of the Code of Harry and its first rule. Dexter's first kill was not as clean as the latter ones. His first human victim was a nurse named Mary and the murder is shown as a flashback in the third episode of the first season. Harry has been in the hospital for a while because of the condition of his heart. Dexter discovered that Mary had been giving Harry too much medicine for his disease and that way slowly trying to kill him. Dexter gets furious and decides to kill the woman, he covers her living room with plastic and waits for the nurse to come home and then kills her, without mercy.

The tragedy behind the Code of Harry is revealed in episode 10 of the second season. As Dexter is keeping Doakes imprisoned in the cabin, he reveals that Harry Morgan did not die of natural causes. Dexter and Debra have been in the belief that Harry's heart condition killed him. The reality is, as it is revealed to Dexter, is that

Harry overdosed on his heart medicine causing his heart to stop. It is a shock to Dexter to realise that his father died because of his actions and he understands this when he thinks about the moment Harry saw him in action for the first time. It is shown as a flashback in episode 10, Dexter is killing a pimp who has murdered several women. Dexter feels obliged to kill the pimp after Chief Matthews, Harry's boss, has been to their house telling Harry that the said pimp has been released for the lack of evidence against him. Harry is furious and tells Dexter "I did the right thing training you" (s. 2, e. 10). However, Harry is not prepared to see the consequences of his training.

Harry walks in on Dexter as he is killing the pimp in their warehouse. He has tied the pimp on a table and is stabbing him to death. Harry is shocked and get nauseous, telling Dexter to stay away from him, as Dexter is proud to present the work of his hands. He has been in the belief that Harry would be proud of him as he has been doing what his father taught him but Harry's reaction is quite the opposite of proudness. At that moment Dexter does not understand how much it affected Harry but as soon he hears about Harry's true cause of death he says:

"The idea of a code was one thing, a grand idea, a noble cause, but the reality of... Harry walked in on what he created and he couldn't live with himself... - I killed my father." (s. 2, e. 10)

Even though Dexter feels responsible for Harry's suicide, he continues to live by the Code. He is honouring the memory of his father by living the way he wanted and killing the ones that got away from the law. He speaks about Harry in a loving and respecting tone "Harry Morgan, the force of justice, the architect of all that I am" and "I

live by my father's law" (s. 2, e. 10). At this point, Dexter can be considered to stand in a crossroad of his future. He can either forget about the Code, begin to live only for the kill and ignore the innocence of his victims or he can continue to kill only those who, in his on justice system, deserve it. He chooses to follow the Code and by doing so he can keep Harry close to him all the time. As William Ryan Force states in his article *The Code of Harry: Performing Normativity in Dexter* (2010) "This Code has a dual service: by concealing his dark 'nature' Dexter can first survive and flourish in human society while, secondly, engaging routinely in serial murder without getting caught." (Force 2010, 335.)

The role of Harry is important throughout the series. As Isabel Santalauria states "Even though Harry's 'ghost' is a product of Dexter's mind and conscience, this personification in Harry, a pervasive father-figure in the series, is significant." Santalauria also underlines the importance of the father figures in the series, they all seem to have a dark side affecting their innocent children. They are either aggressive or have questionable ethics, we see fathers who are abusers, drunkards, drug addicts or cheaters (Santalauria 2010, 65). It interesting to note that Santalauria has, in fact, got a point here. There are not any "normal" father figures in the series that take care of their families without having any dark sides, and Dexter certainly is one of them.

Dexter speaks of Harry's teachings in episode 3 of the first season as he contemplates on how he can never actually be a part of the society:

"Harry taught me that death isn't the end, it's the beginning of a chain reaction, that will catch you if you're not careful. – But there was something Harry

didn't teach me, something he didn't know, couldn't possibly know. The wilful taking of a life represents the ultimate disconnect from humanity. It leaves you an outsider, forever looking in, searching for company to keep. – All you can do is play along in life and hope that sometimes you get it right. Score one for the little wooden boy.” (s. 1, e. 3)

In this long quote Dexter speaks about his loneliness and way his murderous habits have left him as an outsider. He also compares himself to the little wooden boy, Pinocchio, and Harry to the woodcarver Geppetto who wanted a son more than anything in the fairy tale *Pinocchio*. Dexter sees himself as something Harry had created for his own needs. Perhaps Dexter is somewhat bitter to Harry for turning him into a killer with a conscience and thus making him an outsider looking in. It may be interpreted that Dexter thinks he might be better off just following his own urges without Harry's voice as his conscience.

Dexter is a serial killer who resembles the “traditional” but is also very different from them. He kills in order to feed the monster inside of him and he craves for blood. In the first episode of the second season he has had a break in killing after the murder of his brother, Brian, and he is anxious, nervous and suffering. He is like a drug addict who has not had his fix, and he almost cannot control himself. It is clear that he is addicted to the killing and the blood and his body count does speak for that. According to a webpage ([dexter.wikia.com](http://dexter.wikia.com)) dedicated to Dexter by his fans, Dexter's body count rises much higher than a hundred kills.

As J. M. Tyree states in his article *Spatter Pattern* (2008), “Vigilantes simultaneously share territory with cops and outlaws, they break the law in the hopes of helping society.” (Tyree 2008, 85). Dexter can be seen as vigilante who claims that he has not got any feelings at all, but still wants to keep the city safe. It can be said that his moral code is what protects him from becoming all bad and thus we can relate to him. As it is shown in the last part of this subsection, there are many reasons why we can relate to this horrible monster.

It is common to think of serial killers as monsters, as the Other we need to fear. Dexter calls himself a monster and wants to exclude himself from the world, as villains often do. As Force states in his article, Dexter speaks of human interactions and emotions as something bizarre and foreign, thus underlining how different he is from everyone else. “The key for Dexter is to manipulating others’ impressions of him adequately: this is the sociological level of Harry’s code” (Force 2010, 329; 338). Dexter excludes himself from others while he lives among them. He is not the typical villain of popular culture who only lives with the likes of him, he rather holds on to the image of himself he has created in order to be able to perform normativity.

Dexter does not kill any innocent people by choice. If he does, it happens due to circumstances and every time he does it, he regrets it. The planned murders he commits are always of those who deserve it according to Harry’s Code. Can that make him a hero, a vigilante of the Westerns who saves the community from wrongdoers, even though he kills to please the Dark Passenger inside him? Dexter does not only kill the bad guys, he also saves the good ones and those who, in his opinion, have a chance of retribution. In the third episode of the first season, Dexter is hunting down a boy

released from juvenile detention after he has paid his debt to the society after killing one of his peers. Dexter suspects that he will kill again if he has the chance to do it. He follows the boy around, sees him buying a knife from the market and then taking one of his friends to the Everglades by claiming they will see some alligators there. Dexter follows them closely and just as the boy is about to kill his friend, Dexter interrupts him by pretending to be lost in the area. The boy's friend is saved from getting killed but the killer is not willing to give up yet.

Dexter apparently sees himself in the young killer and knows he will try again until he succeeds. Dexter follows him again and confronts him later on in the episode. He talks to the boy about killing and how he must feel the urge to kill, just as he himself does. Dexter does not kill the boy, but speaks to him about the Code of Harry and says he should never kill the innocent ones and that there are ways to channel the urge in to the killing of those who deserve it. Dexter leaves the boy wondering about his words. We do not know whether or not he followed Dexter's advice, but Dexter himself thinks he made an effect to the young boy in the beginning of his killing career.

Another example of saving the lives of the innocent is from season four. The season's main antagonist is a serial killer called Trinity due to his method of killing. As originally thought by the police, he has been murdering around the country in sets of three with altogether over a hundred kills. It later discovered that there were always four victims. He has been able to avoid getting caught for three decades by always changing the murder locations from one city to another. As North America is vast country, it has been virtually impossible for the police to connect all the murders to each other. The only police officer able to do that was the FBI agent Frank Lundy (played by Keith

Carradine) who has been following him without ever actually finding out his true identity. When Lundy finally discovers who Trinity is, he gets killed by Trinity's bullet before telling anyone about his discovery. While Lundy gets killed, Trinity shoots Debra, as well, as she is having a relationship with Lundy and happens to be with him at the parking lot where Trinity is haunting Lundy.

Trinity's killing method consists of four victims. The first victim was always a young boy who he lured into his van by pretending to be a police officer and claiming that something had happened to the boy's parents. He then took the boy into a place where they could be in private for a few days, playing on trains. He called the boy Arthur, as if he was pretending that the boy was himself as a child. After a few days, he would offer the boy ice cream which he had drugged and after the boy lost his conscience, he buried him alive. This relates to the Trinity's own childhood as a neglected son.

The other phase of his killing method was targeted towards a young woman. He went into the young woman's house, waiting for her to come home. Then, as his victim came, he stripped of her clothes and made her come to the bathtub with him. He then took a razor blade and a mirror as they sat together in the tub. He raised the mirror in order for the victim to see herself while she is dying, as a metaphor of Arthur watching his sister in the shower when he was a boy. He then slid the large artery in the victim's thigh and she bled to death.

The third phase of the kill cycle was a woman with two children. Trinity chose a victim, pretended to be walking a dog and chatting casually while at the same time collecting information about the woman's family. After he was sure that the victim

suiting his purposes, he abducted her and made her drive to all tall buildings and climb up. He then gave her two choices, either she would jump down the building and kill herself or Trinity would hurt her children if he had to push her down. This killing phase was “inspired” by Trinity’s own mother who killed herself when Arthur was young. The fourth phase which, for a long time, was not connected to Trinity, was the killing of an older man. Trinity followed him and then killed him by bludgeoning him with some kind of a tool, simultaneously yelling insults at him as his father did to him when he was young. In his kill cycle he goes through his entire childhood traumas by re-enacting them on innocent people.

The purpose of this long description of Trinity’s method is to show how much he resembles Dexter himself. Dexter has his own method of tracking down Trinity and in episode five discovers that Trinity’s true identity is Arthur Mitchell. Dexter follows Mitchell to his house, holding his syringe in his hand, ready to kill him. As he is about to attack, he sees the door of the Mitchell house opening and Mitchell’s wife and children greeting him happily as he came home from a “business trip”. Dexter instantly thinks “He’s like me.” (s. 4, e. 5). This murder cycle imitating Trinity’s childhood reinforces the theory that a serial killing monster is not evil from the birth, instead something truly horrible must have happened to him in order for him to become who he is.

He truly is like Dexter in many ways. He is a teacher and a nice church-going man with a Dark Passenger of his own. As it was stated earlier, Dexter saves innocent people from him and those innocent people were Mitchell’s family. Arthur Mitchell has two children, a son and a daughter, and a wife. They live in a beautiful

home and everything appears to be alright. Dexter soon discovers that Trinity is not like him completely, as he is abusive and cruel to his own family, thus keeping the fear and loathing of his own childhood family going. Perhaps he does not know any other way since his own family was so unhappy, mostly due to his abusive and drunkard father. As Dexter finally catches Trinity in the final episode of the season and gets him on his kill table, he may well save the lives, or at least the peace, of Trinity's family. After killing Trinity, however, he finds his own wife Rita in their own bath tub full of blood as Trinity's final victim. Their son Harrison is sitting in a pool of Rita's blood, exactly as Dexter was found in her mother's blood. Dexter fears that Harrison will continue the kill cycle of his own family and contemplates on the idea if Harrison is now reborn as a serial killer, as he himself was.

These are only some of the examples of Dexter saving the lives of the innocent. Can we now state that he is, in fact, a hero? The tradition of heroism in popular culture originates to the Westerns where the vigilante hero saved communities by fighting the bad guys, as it was stated earlier in this thesis. They had a moral code they used to justify their actions, as does Dexter. Perhaps Dexter is some kind of a hero, protecting his city from the villains who attack the innocent people.

In the second season, the police are trying to find the killer who they have named the Bay Harbor Butcher, who is actually Dexter. In order to avoid getting caught, he decides to frame Sergeant James Doakes as the Butcher, since he has already captivated him and decided to kill him. As the police discover the incriminating evidence, Dexter's blood slides, in James Doakes' car that Dexter has implemented there and after they have been examined, it turns out that all of the victims of the

Butcher are killers themselves. Afterwards, a comic book is made of the Bay Harbor Butcher where he is depicted as the Dark Defender, a superhero keeping the city safe. Dexter is happy to consider himself as a hero instead of a monster. Perhaps he could be both?

As it was shown in subsection 2.2, the theory of the hero can be, if not challenged then supplemented, with the theory of antiheroism. Dexter can be considered to be an antihero as he is working mainly with his own pleasure in mind. It is the careful selection of victims that separates him from the villains of the series. Otherwise he could be as bad as Arthur Mitchell, disguising himself as a regular man with a lovely family but in reality, being a cruel murderer of innocent people.

Dexter can also be seen as the antihero in his code of conduct. He is not the traditional detective but there are certain aspects of him that can be compared to the detective narrative. He uses his contacts in the police force as a way to seek those who deserve to end up on his kill table, as a detective could use his contacts in trying to find the bad guys. He uses methods of punishment that could never officially be accepted by our Western laws (Buchbinder & McGuire 2013, 230).

There is a kind of dualism in the way Dexter sees himself as the Other. He considers himself as the Other in relation to the “normal” people with his Dark Passenger. In addition, he also sees himself as the Other in relation to the villains he kills. As David Buchbinder and Ann Elisabeth MaGuire note on their article,

“Indeed, he marks himself as the Other, in relation to his victims: despite any protest on their part, he sees himself as qualitatively different from them, as

well as Other to the general dominant. In effect, he seeks to defamiliarize himself in relation to the common run of serial killers.” (Buchbinder & McGuire 2013, 232).

As Isabel Santalauria suggests, the field of television and film has changed drastically after the 9/11 attacks: “This situation is even more evident at this particular time in history when pacifism is being superseded by strong militarist principles” (Santalauria 2010, 64). Perhaps this is the reason why antihero narratives have become popular among the viewers. It is easy to relate to the protagonist who is neither all good nor all bad. The final part of this subsection studies why the viewers love this serial killing monster so much that they have even created an ever updating fan page for him.

*Dexter* is a hit television show loved by viewers all around the Western world. As Stephanie Green notes in her article on Dexter,

“Although the spectacle of Dexter’s executions is horrific, viewers are supposed relieved of concern by the promise that Dexter’s danger to others is contained by the Morgan ‘code’. – Viewers watch the scope and deftness of Dexter’s control in the same way audiences would watch a superhero movie.” (Green 2011, 26)

Dexter is a character who everyone can relate to. He is a superhero in a sense that he patrols the city streets when almost everyone is sleeping safely in their beds, looking out for the villains and hunting them down. This is the storyline of numerous superhero movies such as Batman. Bruce Wayne, Batman’s alter ego has a tragic past, too. His

parents are killed right in front of his eyes as a small boy and as an adult, he decides to spend his life protecting his city. Dexter and Batman have many similarities but they differ in one critical manner. Dexter kills for pleasure, Batman kills if he has to.

As Ashley M. Donnelly states in the article *The New American Hero: Dexter, Serial Killer for the Masses* (2012), the lovable rogue theme is en vogue at the moment in the television and film industry. She claims that America enjoys these morally complex characters that mirror their fascination with its own ideals of vigilantism and taking the law into their own hands (Donnelly 2012, 16). As the world is getting more complex by the minute and more challenging to perceive, it may be a comforting thought that at least someone is doing something to make the world a better place, even if it means a serial killer hunting on people.

There has actually been a study conducted on the Dexter fans and their fan website. Christiana Gregoriu published an article in 2012 where she studied the behaviour of the fans in the website. In her article she claims

“The Dexter TV show is ground breaking in its ethical ambiguity; which is why it generated such extensive discussion among fans online. Besides, it confronts us with justice system inadequacies, and demonstrates how we go about understanding good and evil in a secular society” (Gregoriu 2012, 284).

In the modern society where religion does not tell us what is right and what is wrong, perhaps we must all create our own code of behaviour. From this perspective, it may be

a comforting thought that at least a fictional serial killer can have a conscience. The truth is, at least to some extent, that the justice system is somewhat helpless in the face of the ever spreading criminality due to the worsening conditions in the world's economics and the increase of the income differences between the rich and the poor. Perhaps someday there will be vigilantes such as Dexter protecting us?

#### 4 Conclusion

The world of *Dexter* is colourful, the sky is blue, teeth are white and people vary from Latinos to white middle-class Americans. In Dexter Morgan's world, blood runs red and his goal is to only shed it when necessary. In Dexter's world there are only good guys and bad guys, with himself in the middle of the both types. In Dexter's world, the bad guys deserve to die while the good guys need to be protected from the bad ones. Dexter lives by his father's moral code and its most important rules are never to get caught and never kill an innocent.

This thesis began with a theoretical point of view to masculinities and heroism. As the works cited for the thesis indicate, masculinity, or rather masculinities, are in constant change. The idea of a masculine man has its roots in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Ever since that period the traditional gender roles have begun to develop. Traditional gender roles were formed and certain features were categorized as feminine and masculine. Masculine features included, as they still to this day do, e.g. rationality, strong physique and high level of working ethics. Feminine features included emotionality, nurturement and a kind nature.

Many of the masculine features discussed in the theoretical section are, as it was stated earlier, are still considered as masculine. The features which have remained masculine throughout the history of the Western world are strength, power and success in life. The one definition that men in the Western world compare themselves to is hegemonic masculinity. In hegemonic masculinity, the "complete" man is straight, white and middle-class, as Michael Kimmel states (1996, 5-6.) Masculine

men are also considered loners, they do not need anyone to care for them and they rather 'ride alone' than form close social relationships. In hegemonic masculinity, masculine men are also considered to be capable of violence whenever necessary, or just for fun.

These features, among others, were discussed in relation to Dexter Morgan, the protagonist of the Showtime television series *Dexter*. Dexter as the friendly serial killer creates many emotions in the viewers and they do not find his serial killing urges despicable or horrifying. Dexter, in a way is a very masculine man, at least if his character is compared to the traditional masculine features. He is a loner, he claims not to have any emotions and he is strong, middle-class and white. He is also extremely violent and kills bad people in order to satisfy his urge for blood and killing. This thesis shows that *Dexter* is a master of disguises and one of his disguises is the masculine man he appears to be. Dexter performs his life, being true to himself only when he is killing his victims. There are only few people who get to see his true nature, in addition to his victims, but they rarely live to tell about it.

The series include also other types of masculinities, such as Hispanic masculinity and female masculinity. Hispanic masculinity was discussed in this thesis in relation to Dexter's friend and colleague Angel Batista. He is the Latino lover, full of passion and strong emotions. He is not afraid to show how he feels, whether it is love and lust or anger and violence. As it was stated in the thesis, it is hard for a Hispanic man if the wife is in a higher position in the working life. This is proven to be true in *Dexter* as Batista and Maria LaGuerta end up separating because of the tension between them created by the fact that LaGuerta is Batista's senior officer and thus higher in rank.

Female masculinity in *Dexter* is present in the main female character Debra Morgan. She is Dexter's sister who has always tried to be one of the boys in order to make his father as proud of her as he was of Dexter. Even though Debra cannot be considered as butch female, she is very masculine in her behaviour. However, she does have feminine features, too, in addition to her appearance. She is hoping to find a relationship in which she can feel accepted for who she is and loved as she is. Her relationship history cannot be considered very successful as her relationships have the tendency to end for various different reasons. Her masculine features include characteristics such as being a loner, to some extent at least, the capability of violence and the inability to show or discuss her emotions.

Another aspect discussed in this thesis was Dexter as a serial killer and his possible heroism. Many of the studies conducted on serial killers claim that all serial killers have some kind of tragedy behind their vicious characters. Traumatic incidents, such as abuse, alcoholism, violence or all of these combined, that have taken place in their childhood is said to have influenced on them heavily and they have become killers because of those incidents. This is present also in *Dexter*, as both the protagonist Dexter and his brother have experienced a traumatic loss of their mother at a very young age. Their mother was a drug user, killed by her drug dealers in a shipping container with a chainsaw while both of the boys were watching. This is the moment when Dexter himself says he was reborn from his mother's blood to become a serial killer. The only reason why he does not kill random victims, as his brother did, is his adoptive father and his code which was mentioned earlier. The Code of Harry is the key element to why this thesis also considers the question whether or not a serial killer can also be a hero.

Heroism in popular culture derives from the classic Western stories. The hero, a masculine loner, rides from the outskirts of the town to save the community from the greedy landowners terrorising the people. He either ignores the law or the law does not even exist in the first place. The hero has his own moral code he lives by and has a justice system of his own with which he decides who is the villain and who needs his protection. This thesis considers Dexter Morgan's heroism and why can we even think of calling a serial killer a hero. The code Dexter lives by forbids him to kill anyone who does not deserve it, and by killing those are murderers, abusers or drug dealers, for example, he is keeping the city safer for the innocent people living in it. Therefore, we can call Dexter a hero, the Dark Defender, albeit his methods are not approved by the law.

The idea of antiheroism was also discussed in the thesis. An antihero's actions aim to fulfil his own needs and desires, but he can still be considered as a hero for his actions also create good things. Dexter means to an end are highly questionable but they are also effective as he 'takes out the garbage' while satisfying his own needs. Still, it is a scary thought that our community would actually be protected by a serial killer, no matter how effective his method would be.

Whether or not the lovable rogue theme is en vogue, the landscape of television protagonists is widening all the time. The viewers want to see more than just those have it all, the perfect life in the perfect surroundings. It is interesting to note that these lovable rogue stories are increasing all the time. Television series such as *Dexter*, *Breaking Bad*, *Sons of Anarchy* and even *Californication*, are popular mainly due to their protagonists and their characteristics which are far from being nice. They all aspire

to fulfil their own needs and seldom care about the consequences of their actions. The only people they care truly care about are those who are closest to them. It would be interesting to conduct a social study about what this tendency signals about the world's current status and why do we, the viewers, want to see these stories and enjoy them so much. It is very fascinating to see where the television and film industry is going in the course of the next decade, are we going to see more of these characters who only aim to please themselves or will the forever good law-abiding hero make a return to our hearts.

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