



The Characterization of Trauma Response in Tv: The Case of Harrison in The Dexter Franchise

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Abstract

The quality of the representation of situations such as trauma and violence in media is important due to the effects it can have on the audience. However, when done right, media has the ability to be used as a learning tool. In 2006, Showtime released the hit tv series *Dexter*, which eventually turned into a franchise. The series that follows a serial killer with a code that only allows him to kill murderers who have slipped through the cracks of the law, didn't shy away from representing the consequences of traumatic events. In season 3, we are introduced to Dexter's son, Harrison, who as a baby, witnessed the brutal murder of his mother. In subsequent installments of the *Dexter* franchise, *New Blood* (2021-2022) and *Resurrection* (2025-), we see the teenage version of his character dealing with the consequences of trauma, loss and abandonment, eventually learning how to break a cycle of violence. Through a qualitative interdisciplinary analysis of twenty episodes of the *Dexter* franchise, with a model based on trauma response theory, the theory of narrative and ideology in media, we evaluate how the representation, characterization and development of Harrison's case can be used as a cognitive tool for teenagers and young adults to start a conversation about trauma and how to deal with it.

Keywords: cognitive tools; interdisciplinary research; media analysis; representation; traumatic events.