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Psychological and Physical Violence in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* by Jeff Lindsay

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the psychological and physical violence in Jeff Lindsay's *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*. This study analyzed the psychological and social influences on serial killers by using two theories; Milgram's "Obedience Experiment", the experiment proved that the majority of people will obey the instructions that came from higher authority without thinking about moral values. The second theory is Sigmund Freud's beliefs about violence and right he thought that violence is a natural thing and there is a strong relationship between violence and right. The research samples are the serial killers and their victims and how theories put forward affect those characters. The main results of this study are the deep analysis of serial killer characters and an understanding of the main point of the motivations for these violent actions. In *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, Jeff Lindsay employs the traditional style of psychological horror to give a realistic image of serial killers.

Keywords: Dexter, Lindsay, Obedience experiment, Milgram, violence

العنف النفسي والجسدي في رواية ديكستر الحالم الغامض لجيف ليندسي

عمر عباس صلال

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المخلص

حللت الدراسة التأثيرات النفسية والاجتماعية على السفاحين باستخدام نظريتين. "تجربة الطاعة" لميلغرام ، أثبتت التجربة أن غالبية الناس سوف يطيعون التعليمات التي جاءت من سلطة أعلى دون التفكير في القيم الأخلاقية. النظرية الثانية هي معتقدات سيغ蒙德 فرويد حول العنف والحق الذي اعتقد أن العنف شيء طبيعي وأن هناك علاقة قوية بين العنف والحق. عينة البحث هم القتلة المتسلسلين وضحاياهم وكيفية تأثير النظريات المطروحة على تلك الشخصيات. النتائج الرئيسية لهذه الدراسة هي التحليل العميق لشخصيات القاتل المتسلسل وفهم السبب الرئيس للدوافع وراء هذه الأعمال العنيفة. يستخدم جيف ليندسي في روايته ديكستر الحالم الغامض الأسلوب التقليدي للرعب النفسي لإعطاء صورة واقعية للقتلة المتسلسلين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دكستر ، ليندسي ، تجربة الطاعة ، ميلغرام ، العنف

1. Introduction

Jeff Lindsay is a playwright and author of crime and mystery novels, whose pen name is Jeff Lindsay, born July 14, 1952. Jeff is best known for writing the *Dexter Morgan* series of novels. Much of his early work was co-authored with his wife, Hilary Hemingway. It is worth noting that his wife is the daughter of the famous American writer and author, Ernest Hemingway. He born and finished school was born in the USA.

Lindsay released his first novel entitled *Dexter Darkly Dreaming*, which he tried to call the Bloodstain Technician - a name suggested to him by his middle daughter - but he disagreed with the publisher on the name. The novel won the American Edgar Award in the category of Best First Mystery Fiction. However, the award was dropped from him after the team learned that he had previously published works in the 1990s, but under a different name - Jeffrey B. Frontitch-. Lindsey has finished writing the *Dexter series*.

Dexter Morgan is a fictional character from the *Dexter* series of novels, written by Jeff Lindsay, the TV series carries the same name. The actor on the TV show was Michael C. Hall. In the novel and the TV show, Dexter works as a blood analyst in the forensic department of the fictional Police Department. After his work, he works as a serial killer and he targets the other killers. He kills by using his adoptive Dad, Hary, he called this code "Hary's code", it has two rules the first one he must kill the killers, not the innocent people, and the second one he must be away from jail. (Lindsay, 2004) Jeff Lindsay is a playwright and author of crime and mystery novels. He is famous for his well-known series of novels *Dexter Morgan*.

2.1 From Sigmund Freud to Stanley Milgram

Sigmund Freud, known as the father of psychoanalysis, was one of the most influential figures in the field of psychology. Among his many theories and ideas, Freud had much to say about the nature and causes of violence. According to Freud, violence is a fundamental part of the human nature. His psychonalistic theory, the part of our psyche that is driven by primitive, instinctual desires, is central to his view of violence. The id seeks pleasure and satisfaction without regard for social norms, laws, or the welfare of others (Freud, 2011). This primal force is in all of us, and our ability to control it is what distinguish us from animals.

Freud believed that all humans have violent impulses that are innate and that we must learn to control them. He saw aggression as a normal part of the development and a way to assert oneself in the world. However, when these impulses are not properly regulated, they can lead to destructive behaviors and pathological behavior (Freud, 1953). Freud proposed that the suppression of these violent urges by society is necessary for a functional society. Social norms, laws, and ethical values are put in place to regulate and mitigate the expression of these impulses. But if the unconscious impulses of the id are not recognized, they will be acted on.

Freud argued that violence could be traced back to early childhood experiences, particularly in children who experienced abuse or trauma. He argued

that people who were mistreated when they were young could turn to violence as a way to express their anger or pain. Violence, he believed, could become an ingrained pattern of behavior that was difficult to break. Freud also touched upon the role of power in violence (Freud, 1953). He believed that humans have an inherent desire for power and influence. Power could be obtained through both aggression and cooperation. Violence, Freud argued, was a way for the oppressed to reclaim some of their power.

In conclusion, Sigmund Freud's point of view about violence was that it is an inherent part of human nature that must be controlled and regulated by society. He explained that violence is a primitive human impulse that can be traced back to early childhood experiences. Freud also stated that violence can become an ingrained pattern of behavior that is difficult to break. He understood that power plays a role in the violence, and he believed that society must work to create an environment where people feel empowered and safe. Overall, Freud's theories on violence are still relevant today, contributing to the ongoing conversation on human behavior and violence in society.

Stanley Milgram the American psychologist, presented various studies and articles that got a huge number of citations. The most important of these is his Experiments on Obedience, or, Obedience to Authority. Milgram's "Obedience Experiment", the experiment proved that people will obey the instructions that came from authority without thinking about moral values. Freud believes that violence is a natural thing and there is a strong relationship between violence and right. The relationship between Dexter and his dark passenger seems to be as Milgram interprets in his Obedience experiment, the relationship between the participant and the supervisor. Jeff Lindsay borrows psychological elements, so, Crime Horror gains enhanced believability (Lunt, P. K. 2009). If one looks beyond the typical elements of the Crime Horror, one uncovers a latent level of meaning a complex status quo that mirrors the anxieties felt in many modern societies.

Stanley Milgram's obedience experiment is one of the most famous and controversial experiments in the field of social psychology. In this experiment, Milgram sought to understand why people obey authority figures, even when it goes against their own moral or ethical code. The experiment was conducted in 1961 at Yale University, and it involved participants who were instructed to administer electric shocks to a learner in another room. The shocks initially started at a low level and increased in intensity, with the learner screaming and demanding to be released as the shocks became more painful.

What made the experiment controversial was the fact that the shocks were not real, and the learner was a confederate who was pretending to be in pain. The real purpose of the experiment was to see how far the participants would go in obeying the authority figure, who was the experimenter. Milgram's findings were startling, as he discovered that nearly two-thirds of the participants were willing to administer shocks to the highest level, even when the learner was pleading for mercy and appeared to be in distress. This level of obedience to authority figures was far higher than what Milgram had initially predicted, and it led to a great deal of debate and discussion about the ethics of the experiment.

One of the key factors that influenced the participants' behavior was the presence of an authority figure who was giving them instructions. The experimenter was wearing a lab coat and appeared to be stern and authoritative, which made the participants feel as though they had no choice but to obey him. They felt as though they were simply following orders, and that they were not responsible for the consequences of their actions. Another factor that played a role in the participants' behavior was the gradual escalation of the shocks. They were first asked to give a moderate shock, and then gradually told to increase the intensity as the learner's responses became more pronounced. This gradual escalation made it easier for the participants to continue administering the shocks, as they felt that they were simply following the experiment protocol and not doing anything wrong. Milgram's experiment has been criticized for its lack of ethical considerations, as the participants were subjected to psychological stress and made to believe that they were causing harm to someone else. However, it is important to note that the experiment had a significant impact on our understanding of obedience and compliance and has led to a great deal of research on the topic.

Stanley Milgram (1933 –1984) the American psychologist. He presented various studies and articles that got a huge number of citations. The most important of these is his Experiments on Obedience, or, Obedience to Authority, he presented this research in the 1960s during his work at Yale University. Milgram gained his reputation for his “Obedience Experiment”, the experiment proved that people will obey the instructions that came from authority without thinking about moral values. Milgram explained the experiment in an essay he published in the *Psychological Journal*, and later he published it in his book *Obedience to Authority* 1974. (Milgram, 2010)

2.2 Serial Killers in Fiction

From classic novels like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to modern psychological horror novels like Thomas Harris' *Hannibal Lecter* the killers or monsters stir the readers' imaginations and emotions. Serial killers and monsters and the novels about them usually make for horrifying reading. Thomas Harris in his psychological novel *The Silence of the Lambs* takes the readers deep into the mind of a serial killer to introduce Hannibal Lecter's world. Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* was one of the most influential Psychological horror novels of the twentieth century. Her main character, Tom Ripley starts his life with the first step on the social ladder and builds himself from nothing. He is an amoral cold man but at the same time, he is a charming serial killer, which makes him one of the greatest monsters in contemporary horror fiction. Bret Easton Ellis takes the readers on a deep dark journey to reach what does American dream could mean. He Introduces a magnificent serial killer and the critics consider him one of the most important and unforgettable American serial killers.

2.3 The Psychological, Social, and Biological effects on Serial Killers

A Serial killer the one who murders a large number of people at the same time or at different times and place usually with joy, anger, and sexual desire. The reasons behind these actions are psychological, social, and biological. In this section, the study tries to answer the reasons behind the psychological, social, and

biological influences by examining the psychologists' theories and research. According to a large number of studies, the first reason is "not empathizing with people" or a serial killer has zero sympathies for his victim, his family, or society in general. He trains himself to perform as a cold, and cruel person. He justifies his murders by saying he does the right thing or he hears a voice from heaven to kill his victims. The second reason is the troubled childhood, the majority of serial killers have abusive parents, and negative feelings among their family members usually they feel neglected (Allely & Minnis, 2014). The influences of physical and psychological abuse are the main reasons that shape the serial killer's mentality.

Experts have researched why serial killers become violent so they kill many people without real reasons or sympathy. Some of them think they have been ordered by supernatural powers or higher authority. They see their murders as a spiritual experience to make their society a better place or demonize their victims to consider them as a danger to humanity. Serial killers lack power and authority in their childhood so they use violent acts to practice power and authority in their murders. The third reason is their psychopathic character and how they have the desire to control or practice their authority over their victims (Byrne & Senehi, 2012). Serial killers have always been a topic of interest and intrigue for many people due to the gruesome nature of their crimes. It has been studied that serial killers are influenced by various psychological, social, biological, and physical factors. Understanding these factors can assist in identifying potential serial killers before they commit crimes, as well as potentially preventing them from causing harm. Hence, this study aims to discuss and analyze the various influences on serial killers.

2.3.1 Psychological Influence:

The psychological aspect plays a major role in the development of a serial killer. Several psychological theories suggest that most serial killers exhibit antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) or psychopathy. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), ASPD is a mental condition characterized by a disregard for other people and social norms, a lack of empathy and empathy for others, a disregard for legal or moral norms, and a lack of a sense of guilt. Psychopathy, on the other hand, is a personality disorder characterized by impulsive and manipulative behavior, a lack of empathy, as well as a disregard for social norms and moral rights (Carlisle, 1993).

A detachment from reality, failing to connect with other individuals on an emotional level & the desire to inflict pain and suffering are other critical psychological elements identified in serial killers. The majority of serial killers were subjected to physical, emotional, and verbal abuse in their childhood. In most cases, the risk of becoming a serial killer escalates after being exposed to extreme stress or trauma.

2.3.2 Social Influence:

The social aspect can also contribute to the development of serial killers. The socialization theory dictates that people learn many thoughts, feelings, and responses from their environment, including their family & social circle. The

absence of social support and communication throughout their childhood can restrict the development of social skills in serial killers, making it more difficult for them to participate in social interactions. Serial killers are frequently perceived as loners due to their inability to connect with other people on an emotional level. Furthermore, societal expectations might exacerbate the actions of a serial killer. Serial killers often develop fantasies and desires involving murder, rape, and other criminal acts (Estep,2021). Additionally, in some cultures and societies, masculinity is measured by the ability of a person to commit violent acts or crimes, thus encouraging criminal behavior in certain individuals.

2.3.3 Biological Influence:

While psychological and social influences play a significant role in the development of a serial killer, biological factors cannot be ignored either. According to much scientific research, the development of the brain impacts violence. The special structure of the serial killer's brain and the genetic arrangement may play a role in his violent tendencies, and these tendencies increase according to these structures (Morton & Hilts,2008). . All of this is not proven, but scientific studies have come a long way in this field to prove that biological factors have the same influence as social and psychological factors.

2.4 Dexter as a Serial Killer

Jeff Lindsay's novel *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* narrates a story about Dexter Morgan, a forensic expert, and a serial killer who only targets people whom believes are guilty of heinous crimes. Dexter has a unique approach to justice, as he believes that killing other criminals would save society from the evil deeds of these individuals. Through his narration, Jeffrey Lindsay delves deep into the psyche of the human mind, exploring different themes such as life, death, justice, morality, and violence. The novel is centered around the concepts of psychological and physical violence. This research explores the psychological and physical violence in the novel *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*.

Childhood innocence is fleeting during a brutal accident, and Dexter Morgan's life is emblematic of that. He witnesses death at a very young age: at age nine he sees his mother murdered in front of him. Dexter is further traumatized when he is present at his mother's murder. His traumatic experiences would continue to affect his understandable paranoia making trust difficult for him but the coping mechanisms enfranchise him. Dexter's hyper-vigilance becomes one of his greatest assets as a serial killer, allowing him to pre-emptively notice threats. These traits have a basis in psychology, individual traumatic disorder in kids is stayed by victims who become killers later and imitate the violence of their abusers it is a violent cycle in their society.

Through police training, Dexter could isolate and utilize useful characteristics, thus further empowering him. His continual creation of new identities is a way to disassociate from his traumatic past. In his journey to become someone else, he learns the true depth of his strength. Although salvaging his pre-traumatic identity is impossible, he learns that post-traumatic growth is within his grasp. Criminal violence usually involves traumas such as rape, harassment, and homicide, which not only have a bad influence on the victims but also on

eyewitnesses, people who are close to the victims, etc. unluckily, traumatic effects last for long periods.

Dexter lives as a lonely serial killer, and losing his family support, leaving him more susceptible to trauma. He turns to a killer to quieten his insecurities while also attempting to retrieve personal power. Dexter grows up as a loveless person lashing out at everyone around him. These are not deliberate, planned actions, but impulsive ones, undertaken by a person who isn't able to process their psychological situation.

Dexter was born on February 15, 1971. At the beginning of the novel, he knew little information about his past life. Hary the police officer and his wife adopted him, and they told him that his mother has been killed in an accident and they gave him a home after this horrible accident. Hary knew Dexter's violent spirit when he was seven years old. He killed pets and acted violently with others. So Hary decided to teach him how to kill positively through his code. His adoptive father taught him how to kill the criminals who have escaped from justice and avoid killing innocent people.

Dexter witnesses the brutal murder of his mother by a criminal and he left him alone with his mother's corpse for two days. This is the most important psychological trauma in Dexter's life that led to the turning point that changed him into a serial killer. Lindsay in his first novel the first novel *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, Dexter loses his adoptive mother, who died of cancer. Dexter's journey with violence begins too early when Hary knew that he killed pets and acted violently with others. So he believed that Dexter's need to kill is so strong, thus it needs to be controlled.. He chooses to teach him the art of killing serial killers and avoiding prison. Before his death, Hary tells him to kill his first criminal. In his test, Milgram found that participants believed the results were necessary even when they caused harm to participants with electric shocks, as Dexter believes in his moral purposes when he kills his victims. (Lindsay, 2004)

Dexter plays part in "The Miami Butcher" crime, the serial killer who cuts his victims and puts their parts in trucks. Dexter takes this crime personally because the criminal kidnaps his sister Debra, and when Dexter faces him the killer reveals their true relationship. They were biological brothers and both of them witnessed their mother's murder. Dexter convinces Brian to spare Debra, and instead the two kill Lieutenant Mejia LaGuerta. In the final parts of the novel, his sister tells him that his life is a big secret after saving her life. She seems to accept his secret, but she lives an inner conflict between her brother and her duty as a police officer. According to Freud violence is a natural thing and there is a strong relationship between violence and right (Einstein & Freud, 1933).

In the second novel, *Dearly Devoted Dexter*; another violence cycle is illustrated.. His enemy, Doackes, believes that Dexter is a serial killer and starts following him. Soon, the two must stop a serial killer named "Dr. Danko," the doctor who tortures his victims severely. Dexter loves a new girl "Rita" and he wants to spend more time with her. At the same time, the serial killer tries to intrude on Dexter's life and finally they both discover that they have "dark

passengers", and he tries to lead him by using his father's code. In the novel's climax, the serial killer takes Dexter and Doackes as hostages to kill them. He kills Doackes but Dexter's sister saves his life.

I do understand, Father,' I said, and there was something in my voice, the Dark Passenger's voice now, and the sound of it froze him. He lifted his head slowly to face me and what he saw in my eyes made him very still. 'I understand perfectly,' I told him, moving very close to his face. The sweat on his cheeks turned to ice. 'You see,' I said, 'I can't help myself, either. (Lindsay, 2005)

In novel number three of the series, Dexter shows his dark passenger as an independent character inside him. Some critics connect the dark passenger to an old Middle Eastern god called Molach which has many characters and this old god is a serial killer who killed even his children. "I was never more alive than when the Dark Passenger was driving." (Lindsay, 2005) learns the Dark passenger's true nature when Dexter knew that the dark passenger's reality is if he "leaves" him for a brief period, scaring him into searching for possible reasons for his existence. In the Obedience experiment, Milgram explained that; if the connections between the actor and the learner had the role in the experiment, there would be another role for the connection between the actor and the supervisor. In the second test, the supervisor varied the connections between the actor and his supervisor. In the first experiment, the supervisors stand away from the actors for a few steps while in the second experiment, the supervisors stand out of the room and give particular orders by phone.

In the third experiment, the supervisors disappeared from the scene but the orders given by the recorder the level of obedience is different from one experiment to another. Some of the actors obeyed their supervisors in their presence is three times stronger than orders from the recorder everything in the experiments has been changed; the energy, the effects, the psychological impact, and other things all these elements reflect the psychological distance from the supervisors. The relationship between Dexter and his dark passenger seems to be as Milgram interprets it in his Obedience experiment, the relationship between the participant and the supervisor (Milgram, 2010). The dark passenger at the end of this novel backs to Dexter.

Milgram says that human nature is not worthy of being relied upon to keep a person far from violence and cruelty. When orders come from evil powers like in the case of Dexter and other serial killers they believe they hear voices from God or angels. A large number of people will obey their dark passengers without thinking about any consequences of their actions as people who torture others in Milgram's experiments. In The fourth novel, Lindsay introduces Dexter in France on his honeymoon. When he returns to Miami, Dexter enters into another conflict with a serial killer. His Wife Rita is pregnant now with his child (Lindsay, 2009). This new situation makes Dexter live a psychological struggle between his secret life as a serial killer and his life as a father of an infant. His daughter moves the humanitarian part inside his character.

2.5 Psychological Violence

Psychological violence is the process of using verbal or nonverbal behaviors to control or manipulate another individual. This form of aggression is often subtle and non-physical, but it can cause significant trauma to the victim. One of the most prominent examples of psychological violence in *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* is the way Dexter's abusive childhood has impacted his behavior "Whatever made me the way I am left me hollow, empty inside, unable to feel. It doesn't seem like a big deal. I'm quite sure most people fake an awful lot of everyday human contact. I just fake all of it" (Lindsey, 2004). Dexter is an adopted child who was neglected and abused by his biological parents. As a child, he never experienced the love and affection that every child deserves. The psychological trauma that he experienced as a child has shaped his moral compass and made him a cold and calculated killer.

Another example of psychological violence in the novel is the relationship between Dexter and his foster sister Deborah. Deborah is a police officer who is unaware of Dexter's true nature. Throughout the novel, Dexter uses his intelligence and charm to manipulate Deborah into trusting him. Dexter regularly lies to Deborah about his whereabouts and what he is doing. While she never suspects him of being a killer, she realizes that he is hiding something from her. This element of deception adds an element of psychological violence as Dexter's lies slowly erode their bond. Furthermore, Dexter's interactions with his victims also reveal his insidious nature. He uses psychological violence to break his victims down, making them easier targets. For example, Dexter makes his victims confess to their crimes before he murders them

I secured the priest to the table with duct tape and cut away his clothes. I did the preliminary work quickly; shaving, scrubbing, cutting away the things that stuck out untidily. As always I felt the wonderful long slow build to release begin its pounding throughout my entire body. It would flutter through me while I worked, rising and taking me with it, until the very end, the Need and the priest swimming away together on a fading tide.

He psychologically torturing them before ending their lives. In some cases, Dexter takes things even further, making his victims believe that they have a chance of escaping before ultimately killing them.

2.6 Physical Violence

Physical violence is the use of force to cause injury, harm, or death. In the novel *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*, physical violence is a recurring theme "Really now: If you can't get me my newspaper on time, how can you expect me to refrain from killing people?" (Lindsay, 2004). Throughout the book, Dexter commits violent crimes against his victims. He uses his forensic skills to stalk his prey, typically selecting. Dexter's need for violence, starts since his childhood, a behavior of him killing his pets and acts violently, is witnessed by Hary. So he thinks that Dexter's need to kill is in his nature and must be under his authority. Hary gives Him his code and chooses to kill serial killers and avoid jail. Before his early death, Hary gives Dexter permission to kill his first serial killer.

3. Conclusion

Crime horror often combines unbelievable patterns with contemporary individual experiences. *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* a novel by Jeff Lindsay also focuses on the intensely personal, as seen in the diverging experiences of Dexter Morgan. Jeff Lindsay believes in the ‘focalized character’, a term that is derived from the psychological elements of Realism. Through this appropriation, Crime Horror gains enhanced believability. If one looks beyond the typical elements of the Crime Horror, one uncovers a latent level of meaning a complex status quo that mirrors the anxieties felt in many modern societies.

Since *Darkly Dreaming Dexter*’s narrative sometimes offers an identifiable moral, it forces the readers to reflect on a deeper, personal meaning, thereby therapeutically challenging societal beliefs. Depicting suffering in such an unvarnished way might seem sadistic, but depicting trauma holistically as a component of a complex, lifetime healing process could give readers the feeling that their pain is surmountable. Engaging with fiction in such a way reminds us what is to be a human. Psychological Trauma makes victims struggle with hard feelings, bad memories, and Psychological abnormalities that won’t heal easily. It also leaves victims with anxiety, alienation, and hard to trust people.

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