TITLE: DEXTER V. DEATH ROW

Dexter Morgan, to the charge of murdering approximately 135 people, chopping most of them up and throwing their dismembered bodies in the ocean, how do you plea?

After having recently rewatched Dexter for the third time I started to wonder if Dexter’s murders were really that different from death sentencing in his home state of Florida.  This led me to question how Dexter’s criminal vetting process stood up to Florida’s criminal statutes.  I also looked into how Dexter’s victims compared with the death row population, both, in terms of demographics and the mental states of the victims at the time of their death.

**Dexter v. The Law**

Chapter [775.082](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0700-0799/0775/Sections/0775.082.html) of the 2016 Florida Statutes states that a person who has been convicted of a capital felony shall be punished by death if the proceeding held to determine sentence results in a determination that such person shall be punished by death, otherwise such person shall be punished by life imprisonment and shall be ineligible for parole.

[Capital felonies](http://www.ralphbehr.net/capital-felony.html) can include such offences as murder, capital drug trafficking, armed kidnapping and some felony crimes when there are death or sexual components to the felony charge.

Having been raised by his adoptive father, a homicide detective with the Miami Metro PD, Dexter, too, abided by a scrupulous code that only permitted him to kill people who had committed murder.  Leading to the conclusion that his vetting process, aside from the lack of a jury, fell closely in line with the Florida Statutes.

**Dexter v. Death Row Demographics**

During the [2014-2015 fiscal year](http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/annual/1415/FDC_AR2014-15.pdf), there were 395 inmates on Florida’s death row.  Of those inmates 98.7% of them were males and only 5 of them were females.

A similar dichotomy between men and women is found in Dexter’s victimology, where only 10.3% of his known victims were female and 70.7% were male.

There appears to be a slight gap in the average age between Dexter’s victims (40 years old) and those executed by Florida’s death penalty (47.6 years old).  The fact that the majority of Dexter’s victims were in their 30s could be seen as evidence that he showed a tendency to kill people around his own age, which could account for why his victims were younger than those who were legally sentenced to death.

One [study](http://webs.wofford.edu/pechwj/Crime%20Rates%20and%20Local%20Labor%20Market%20Opportunities%20in%20the%20US%20-%201979-1997.pdf) found that high crime rates were significantly correlated to low wages and unemployment.  This conclusion, however, is at odds with Dexter’s victims.  It appears that, aside from professional criminals (including: drug dealers, fencers of stolen goods, hitmen, gang members and immigrant smugglers), a high percentage of his victims held meaningful careers (including those in medicine, law & order and academia).

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This aberration could be due to the fact that Dexter tended to target criminals who slipped through the system.  It seems reasonable to assume that because of their occupations those people may have made enough money to either hire more prestigious lawyers or may have been educated enough to avoid getting caught.

**Death Row v. Public Opinion**

Ignoring the capital offense and only taking into consideration the demographic information of, both, Dexter’s victims and of the prisoners executed on Florida’s death row, it seems that white men in their 30s-50s are the most susceptible to becoming victims to either Dexter or the death row.  Interestingly enough, [surveys](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/29/support-for-death-penalty-lowest-in-more-than-four-decades/) have shown that white men in 30s-60s are the most likely demographic to support the death penalty.

**Dexter v. Final Words**

So far the similarities between Dexter and Death row are pretty grand.  Perhaps the largest difference can be seen through the eyes of the victims.  Texas Department of Criminal Justice provides a [dataset](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/death_row/dr_executed_offenders.html) of the last words spoken by inmates before they are put to death.  The following graphics represent the final words of inmates executed on Texas's death row and Dexter’s victims, respectively.

The differences here can be seen in the connotation of the words.  In the death row word cloud there are religion-related words like (god, lord, heaven) and other words like thank, love, family, hope, sorry and forgive.  Whereas, in Dexter’s victims’ word cloud there are various profanities, in addition to words like sorry, kill, burn and dead.

Being that the vast majority of the victims in each case are guilty, the differences in connotation are most likely a result of the length of time they were given to accept the inevitability of their death.  The average number of years between an offense and execution in Florida during 2014-2015 was [17.2 years](http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/annual/1415/FDC_AR2014-15.pdf).  Whereas the time between the offense and execution of Dexter’s victims was usually weeks, if not days.  The amount of time the perpetrator had to think about their crime may have affected their acceptance of their pernicious situation.

**The Verdict**

It has [recently come to light](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/24/opinion/the-death-penalty-nearing-its-end.html?_r=0) that, for the first time in nearly half a decade, support for capital punishment is a minority opinion.  Nonetheless, vigilante justice remains a hot topic in TV and movies.  As to the question to how Dexter’s vigilantism compares to legal punishment by death, my findings suggest that due to Dexter’s code and his arduous vetting process his efficiency is comparable to that of a jury.  In addition, assuming that the legal system isn’t biased against any group of people, the similarities in victim demographics between inmate executions and Dexter’s victims seems to indicate that he is also not biased against any specific group.

So, apart from the view of the victim, Dexter’s track record as a vigilante seems to be on par with Florida’s justice system.  Perhaps there are other valid reasons, but lacking the sufficient legal knowledge I struggle to see why, if Dexter’s victims were proven to have been guilty of murder in the first degree, Miami would be more inclined to prosecute him in season two than to delegalize the death penalty.

Obviously the legal process is necessary to ensure a fair trial, but what about the murderers who slip through the cracks?  If Dexter ensured, above and beyond any reasonable doubt that they were guilty and, as a result, subjected them to his own death penalty, perhaps he is no more guilty than Florida’s death sentencing procedures.