

A theoretical analysis of richard ramirez



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Between 1984 and 1985, Richard Ramirez embarked on an unprecedented criminal rampage in the Los Angeles and San Francisco metro areas, killing and raping at least 14 victims. Known for his penchant to hunt nocturnally, Ramirez was aptly nicknamed the “ Night Stalker.” His activity shocked the nation with its gruesome and vigor, terrifying countless men and women across the United States. After his capture in 1985, Ramirez developed a cult-like following of supporters, one of whom married him in 1996 while he was on death row. Prior to his rampage, Ramirez was a ticking time-bomb, indoctrinated and afflicted by numerous key drivers that led to his string of disastrous deeds. However shocking his actions may be, theoretical analysis can be applied in order to explain and possibly understand how a human can be capable of such monstrosities.

Born on February 29, 1960, Richard Leyva Muñoz Ramirez was born in El Paso, Texas to Mexican immigrants Mercedes and Julian Ramirez. Julian, a former Juarez police officer, worked a steady job as a laborer for the Santa Fe railroad. Mercedes worked at the Texan bootmaker Tony Lama, painting and treating boots with chemicals such as benzene, toluene, and xylene. In the 1950s, the extreme toxicity of benzene, toluene, and xylene had not been discovered, so Mercedes worked with these chemicals without any form of ventilation or protection. When she was pregnant with Richard, her fifth and final child, she saw a specialist regarding the extreme pain and discomfort she was experiencing as a result of her ingestion of the toxic chemicals. Already at the fifth month of her pregnancy, the doctor informed her that she should immediately quit her job at the factory or her child would die before birth. She quit immediately and Richard was born without issue. As a baby,

Richie, as he was referred to by his family, didn't cry much and ate and slept well. He was by all means considered a healthy baby.

When Richard was 2 years old, a large dresser fell on top of him leaving him unconscious. He was rushed to the hospital where he was given 30 stitches to his forehead. This was the first of two traumatic head injuries he sustained as a young child. Growing up, Richard was raised in a struggling household. Both of his parents worked most of the day and his older siblings frequently got in trouble. Richard's father, Julian, had a flaring temper and routinely disciplined his children by severely beating them. When Julian was especially angry he would succumb to self-harm, beating his head against a wall or with a hammer. At the age of 5, Richard sustained his second traumatic head injury, receiving stitches after getting knocked unconscious by his sister on a swing. In the fifth grade, he was diagnosed with Temporal Lobe Epilepsy after having a seizure in school. As a child, he was considered a good student who paid attention in class and did not have discipline issues. According to testimonies, Richard may have been molested by a teacher who frequently preyed on his brothers, although he claims not to remember any specific incidents. He also witnessed a neighborhood pedophile sodomize a local boy with a candle stick.

When Richard was 12, his cousin, a Green Beret, returned from Vietnam. His cousin, Miguel, was an idol to Richard and showed him numerous pictures from his time at war. One set of pictures involved him receiving fellatio from a Vietnamese woman while he held a gun to her head, and a subsequent picture of him holding the decapitated head of that same woman. Along with these pictures, Miguel told Richard extremely graphic stories of rape and

murder during his time overseas. Richard quickly discovered that he was sexually aroused by these stories and images. At the age of 13, Richard witnessed Miguel shoot and kill his wife during an argument. After this incident, he lost completely lost interest in school and focused on stealing and smoking marijuana with friends. Around this period Richard visited Los Angeles for the first time to see his older brother. He was allured by the size and wealth of the city, and the endless opportunities to commit crime. As Richard aged, he became interested in heavy metal music, specifically AC/DC, and ran with a group that frequently smoked marijuana and robbed houses and cars. He also developed interests in martial arts, horror movies, and hunting. He would stalk and hunt rabbits, coyotes, and birds in order to gut them and feed the entrails to his dog.

Richard quickly developed a reputation as a burglar and was subsequently sent to a Texas youth camp for juvenile delinquents at 17. Upon returning from the camp, he completely dropped out of school and soon after had his first sexual experience with a prostitute. At 18 he moved to Los Angeles and became a devout follower of the Church of Satan. While in Los Angeles, Richard became a heavy cocaine and alcohol user, habits he funded by his nightly bouts of theft. During this period he was arrested numerous occasions for various thefts. Richard spent most of his days alone shooting up cocaine and watching television. During the night he would rob houses and cars and pick up prostitutes. He completely stopped paying attention to his hygiene and maintained a diet consisting of mostly candy, causing tooth decay.

On June 28, 1984 Richard committed his first of a string of murders. While an elderly woman named Jennie Vincow slept, he snuck in through her window and stabbed her to death. He then raped her dead body and fled the scene. Later in March 1985, Richard committed four more murders. First, he followed a young woman into her apartment, shooting but not killing her, and then shot and killed her roommate and fled the scene. Then around an hour later he murdered another young woman, pulling her from her car and shooting her in the road after she attempted to confront him for stalking her in his car. Richard believed that Satan guided and protected him while he committed his crimes, motivating him to continue and expand his acts of evil. Later that same month, Richard broke into an elderly couple's house, shooting the husband in the head while he was sleeping. Then while Richard ransacked the house for valuables, the wife drew a shotgun and attempted to shoot him, but the gun was not loaded. Startled but unharmed, Richard proceeded to shoot her three times and then decided to mutilate her body. He carved an upside down cross into her chest, removed her eyes, and made an unsuccessful attempt to have sex with the corpse.

A few months later Richard committed his next string of gruesome crimes. He snuck into the house of a retired trucking company sales manager and stealthily inspected the inside of the home. When Richard came across the retiree's bedroom, the man heard him chamber his gun and he pulled out a firearm from his bedside drawer. However, his instincts were not quick enough and Richard shot him in the face. He then walked into the bedroom of the man's handicapped wife, and proceeded to rape her. He then grabbed whatever valuables he could in the house and fled the scene. Somehow the

man survived the shot and was able to call the police, but he unfortunately died in the ambulance. From the months of May to August 1985 he committed a massive series of rapes, robberies, and murders with a variety of weapons, including a tire iron, a variety of knives, and his .22 pistol. His victims ranged from the ages of 6 to 75 years old, and his crimes featured the mutilation of corpses and the painting and carving of pentagrams on the crime scenes and bodies. His final attack occurred on August 24, 1985. He snuck through the back door of a young couple's house and shot the man three times in the head. He then bound the woman with neckties and proceeded to rape and sodomize her. Richard then searched the house for valuables and told the woman to say, "Tell them the Night Stalker was here," before fleeing the scene (Carlo, 2011, p. 151). Miraculously the man survived the shots and the woman was able to give a detailed account of her encounter with the "Night Stalker" to the police. The police then located Richard's stolen vehicle and were able to recover fingerprints from the interior, allowing them to identify Richard Ramirez as their suspect. After attempting to visit his brother in Tucson, Arizona, Richard returned to Los Angeles, unbeknownst of his status as a wanted criminal. Soon upon his return, he attempted to carjack a woman but was chased by an angry mob who beat him senselessly until the police arrived at the scene. Upon his arrest, Richard was charged with 13 counts of murder, 5 attempted murders, 11 sexual assaults, and 14 burglaries. He was consequently sentenced to death by gas chamber and spent the rest of his life sitting on death row. At the age of 53, Richard died of complications of B-cell lymphoma.

Richard Ramirez impressively fits all three classification of a hedonistic killer. As a child, he discovered he derived intense sexual arousal from his cousin's pictures and verbal accounts of rape and murder in Vietnam. This intense arousal was a key component of his brutal attacks, as he was sexually charged by the act of killing. He also frequently raped and sodomized his victims, identifying him as a lust-oriented killer. He was also motivated by the sadistic thrills of beating and torturing his victims, as he frequently mutilated the corpses by carving Satanic images in them or removed body parts such as the eyes, typical behavior of a thrill-oriented killer. His murders were also motivated by monetary gain, as he once robbed one of his victims for \$30, 000 shortly before his capture. He typically robbed his victims to support his drug habit and lifestyle, identifying him as a comfort-oriented killer.

Richard can be considered an archetype of the disorganized asocial lust killer. He was below average intelligence, as he stopped paying attention in school at 13 and dropped out before graduation. He was socially inadequate, paying absolutely no attention to his hygiene or appearance to others. He was of low birth-order, the fifth of five children, and was the victim of extremely harsh discipline from his father. He lived completely alone, spending most of his days watching television and shooting up cocaine. He was sexually incompetent, resorting to prostitutes and his victims for sexual pleasure. He also exhibited significant behavior changes, such as his addiction to cocaine and his adoption of Satanism. He did not hold a job, relying on burglary to support his lifestyle. His crime scenes were also extremely typical of a disorganized asocial lust killer. He rarely if ever

planned his crimes, usually the result of a spontaneous urge to kill while performing a robbery. When he did plan his murders, they were merely a simple plan to kill in the name of Satan, not involving any specifics. His victims were always complete strangers and he employed minimal conversation, with his rare dialogue usually involving something related to Satan. He rarely put any effort into hiding his victims or cleaning up the crime scene, although he would sometimes attempt to wipe for fingerprints. He also frequently attempted to have sex with the corpses of his victims.

Richard was afflicted by organic mental illness. When his mother was pregnant with him, she ingested numerous toxic chemicals on a daily basis while working at a factory. Later as a child, he sustained two traumatic head injuries. Growing up, he was the victim of physical combat by his father as a form of discipline. As an adult, he was a heavy user of cocaine and other psychoactive substances. All of these factors are attributed to the development of severe brain damage. Richard's behavior was consequently emblematic of extreme brain damage. He had little to no interest in social interaction, spending the majority of his days and nights alone. He spent no attention to his hygiene, as he was known for his disgusting smell as well as his rotting teeth. He exercised an indiscriminate selection of food and gluttony, with his diet consisting of mostly candy. Over time, he stopped exhibiting remorse for his crimes, " Once there was a time when he had some remorse-had second thoughts about killing; but that was all a long time ago." (p. 81). This lack of concern regarding the consequences of his crimes is also typical of someone with extreme brain damage. Affective changes related to his brain damage include extreme manic states, where

Richard would embark on killing sprees in order to grab the attention of the public eye and please Satan. The most dangerous type of person is an individual with a head injury on psychoactive drugs. Richard Ramirez suffered numerous brain injuries over the course of his life and was a heavy user of psychoactive substances, implying that he can be considered to be the most dangerous type of person.

Richard's experiences as a child precipitated his actions as an adult, demonstrating the efficacy of Social Learning Theory. This theory states that aggressive behavior is learned by observing what other do and seeing the consequences of those actions. In the household, Richard routinely witnessed extreme violence under the guise of parental discipline, as his father would severely beat him and his brothers. As he grew up, he began spending a lot of time with cousin who enjoyed gloating about his acts of extreme violence as a soldier. This same cousin shot his wife in front of Richard and subsequently only spent four years in a mental facility after pleading guilty by temporary insanity. Richard's cousin and his brothers reinforced his actions as he grew older, accompanying him during burglaries and while ingesting psychoactive substances. Richard would also accompany his cousin secretly spying on women while they changed clothes. When Richard moved in with his sister temporarily, she disapproved of his behavior as a peeping Tom, however she never explicitly punished him, further reinforcing his behavior as a sexual deviant. Richard routinely imitated his family's behavior with consistent reinforcement, influencing his devolution into a life of horrific crime.

Another possible explanation for Richard's deviant behavior is Classic Strain Theory. Strain Theory focuses on the deviant behavior of lower-class adolescent males. The theory claims that the inability to gain status and acceptance in conventional society produces strain. Richard faced societal challenges growing up as a low-income minority, resorting to burglary due to his inability to gain status and acceptance in conventional society. Richard attempted to fit in as a child, specifically in regards to athletics. He excelled as a football player and considered his time on the field as a form of solace. In the 9th grade, while playing his position of quarterback, Richard experienced a seizure on the field and was immediately cut from the team by the coach. This is an example of his inability to be accepted by traditional society despite his concerted efforts. Due to a multitude of factors including his home situation, the influence of his cousin, and brain damage, Richard succumbed to the strain of society, potentially explaining his deviant behavior.

Richard's criminal behavior can also be understood using Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime. This theory focuses on childhood socialization which can produce an enduring criminal predisposition called low self-control. As covered above, Richard's dangerous home environment heavily contributed to his low self-control. He exemplified the standard of low self-control. He acted impulsively, committing burglaries and murders without much thought. He preferred simpler tasks, targeting elderly people and young women for his various crimes. He sought out risk, as his daily activities were restricted to drug use, burglary, violence, and sexual encounters with prostitutes, all of which are high-risk activities. He also had

an unrelenting temper, which according to Carlo was typical in the Ramirez family (p. 211). Richard's low self-control, combined with his ample crime opportunity living on the streets of Los Angeles resulted in his lengthy rap sheet of crimes.

By applying research on the classifications of serial killers, information regarding organic mental illness, Social Learning Theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime, and Classic Strain Theory, one may attempt to understand and potentially explain Richard Ramirez's despicable actions. However terrible his decisions may be, one must consider the multitude of factors that precipitated his descent into one of the most famous and prolific serial killers in American history.

References

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