



111 **A Biopsychosocial Analysis of the Serial Sexual Crimes of Serial Killer Richard Ramirez**

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The goal of this presentation is to acquaint the forensic community with a biopsychosocial model for the study of serial killers, which includes a neurodevelopmental component.

From 1984 to 1986 serial killer Richard Ramirez terrorized the citizens in the southern California counties of the Los Angeles and Orange. Ramirez was eventually convicted of 19 murders and many other sex crimes. Several accounts of Richard Ramirez have been published. However, his case has received relatively little attention by forensic mental health professionals and criminologists. This may be in part due to the lack of any in-depth mental health evaluation. However, there is a wealth of information that is centrally relevant to the psychiatric nature of Richard Ramirez crimes. In this presentation, the defendant was studied from a neuropsychiatric developmental perspective. The authors have focused on the defendant's character structure by using criteria from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR). Also used was DSM-IV-TR in an effort to clarify Ramirez's paraphilic psychopathology. The possibility that neuropsychiatric and neurodevelopmental disorders may be associated with his serial killing behavior was also explored. In addition, because serial killing behavior may be associated with behavioral factors that do not always fit well with psychiatric categories, other methods of behavioral categorization were used that may shed some light on his crimes.

Richard Ramirez was the fifth and youngest child born February 29, 1960, to Julian and Mercedes Ramirez. During his mother's pregnancy she worked in a factory in which there was putative exposure to hazardous materials. However, Richard Ramirez was born without birth defects unlike his brother Joseph who was born with a degenerative bone disease. Ramirez was raised in a two-parent family with his mother assuming most of the child rearing tasks. Of his four siblings, Richard was most attached to his only sister who was a couple of years his senior. At age two years Ramirez sustained a head injury with resulting loss of consciousness that lead to a medical evaluation. Subsequent to this injury, he began experiencing seizures and long staring spells. He was eventually diagnosed with temporal lobe epilepsy but apparently never received treatment for this condition. The seizures apparently stopped all together during early adolescence.

During his early adolescence Ramirez became more isolative from his family and other acquaintances. He had three older brothers who also became involved in drug abuse. However, none of them had any influence on him. A notable exception to Ramirez's social isolation was his relationship with a cousin who had recently returned from military duty in Vietnam. His cousin who introduced him to recreational drugs, sex, guns, and a violent lifestyle profoundly influenced Ramirez. At age 12, Richard witnessed his cousin kill his wife. Although Richard did not report having been the witness of a serious crime, his cousin was eventually convicted for the murder of his wife. Thereafter Ramirez became increasingly involved in burglaries and related drug seeking activities as well as refining his interest in paraphilic ideas. At age 15 he attempted to rape a woman. Fortunately for her, the woman's husband intervened. However, the victim refused to return to El Paso to testify against him. The charges against him were then dropped. At about age 17, he made his way to Los Angeles, CA, to visit a brother residing there. This visit convinced Ramirez that Los Angeles would be an ideal place to pursue his drug habit, his stealing, and his paraphilic sexuality. Ramirez settled in Los Angeles at age 18 where for approximately the next decade he developed an idiosyncratic version of Satanism in association with serial rape and sexual homicide.

In this presentation the authors propose that sexual serial killing behavior such as that exhibited by Richard Ramirez may be optimally explained by a four component system that includes 1) sex drive, 2) aggression, 3) psychopathy, and 4) a neuropsychiatric developmental component. Each of these components in turn interacts with the environment of the serial killer to make his predisposition to sexual serial homicidal behaviors possible.

Serial Killers, Serial Crime, Sexual Homicide