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The study of Criminology covers many vast topics, but there is one category of people that fit into criminology: the best serial killers. People have been fascinated by serial killers for a very long time with hundreds of documentaries being made. Not only are serial killers one of the focal points of media in the world we live in today they provide excellent examples of criminological theories. Richard Ramirez “The NightStalker” is an excellent example of Albert Bandura's social learning theory and Robert Merton’s strain theory. The conflicts Ramirez went through in his life made him an example for how stress can affect a human.

Richard was a very troubled child taking influence from everything around him. In order to understand the criminological reasons behind Richard’s crimes there has to be an understanding of his childhood and major events that may have led to him becoming what he was. Criminologists have studied him in the past and, based on social theories there are two that apply the best to Ramirez. As a child several big things happened to Ramirez that left an impact on his life, as a small child he hit his head several times (Carlo, 2006). This is significant because at an early age children can have very bad developmental problems. After Ramirez's brother had gotten home from Vietnam Ramirez and his brother smoked weed together, and he showed him photos of corpses and told stories of what he did to torture people (Carlo, 2006). Once Ramirez reached the age of 13 he witnessed his cousin murder his wife, then things began to spiral further (Carlo, 2006). Ramirez dropped out of school in the ninth grade and then started to rob homes and neglect his hygiene, which could show him shedding his humanity in a strange way (Carlo, 2006).

Clearly Ramirez experienced a lot of trauma in his life to lead him to this point.

The violence and drug abuse in his life pushed him down a path that would be hard to climb out of. This made him vulnerable to becoming what he is. He is also a prime example of two different criminological theories. Ramirez is a prime example of Social Learning theory and Strain theory.

Ramirez growing up was able to witness a lot of bad things. From the Vietnam stories to murder he saw they definitely impacted him in many ways. These things that happened to Ramirez however is a prime example of social learning theory. Social learning theory is essentially the theory of monkey see monkey do, which was coined by Albert Bandura. Bandura's theory shows how the brain can process an event (Grusec, 1994). There is an input from the outside in Ramirez's case; it would be his family life. Ramirez viewing violence and experiencing drug abuse at a young age led to him internalizing it. That leads to the second step of the cognitive model where the brain processes the external data it received (Grusec, 1994). That leads to the third step where the output is behavior (Grusec, 1994). This can be seen as Ramirez acting out as a child or when he became older and murdered people. A child's mind is very impressionable and the fact that he dropped out of school only makes this worse because leaving school gave him less positive role models. Ramirez is a perfect example of strain theory and how it can influence a person.

Social learning theory may be a good example of how Ramirez acts, but strain theory also fits him perfectly. Strain theory, proposed by Robert Merton, is the concept that the social factor that can cause strain can lead to crime. "Strain theory argues that adolescents are pressured into delinquency by the negative affective states-most notably anger and related emotions- that often result from negative relationships." (Agnew 1992). Strain theory fits Ramirez perfectly considering; Ramirez had a bad home life considering the early age of drug use while the brain is

still developing. Witnessing tragedies can cause a lot of strain in a persons' life. Considering Ramirez dropping out he must not have been attached enough to any friends at school to be willing to stay. Humans are social creatures and a lack of human connection can hurt people. Ramirez definitely had his brain messed with a lot as a child. A troubled childhood, drug use, and witnessing death leave a lasting mark on someone. The mental deterioration can be clearly seen in the way Ramirez refused to use proper hygiene. He had given up on something that everyone does; this certainly shows signs of mental health problems. This fits Strain theory considering how he was affected by his family with stories of aggression.

Ramirez was an awful person and there is no excuse for what he did yet criminological theories can help explore the factors that lead Ramirez down the path he went. Social learning theory showed how he learned from his surroundings and that led to him being a killer. Strain theory showed how stressors in life can have lasting effects on a person and change their brain as a result of trauma. The negative impacts can leave lasting effects on a person who showed Ramirez's unresolved conflicts due to childhood trauma. While any of these could be true there was a mix of both in Ramirez and no one theory can be right.

References

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