

## Winona Ryder Kleptomania 1

Running Head: PSYCHOLOGY WINONA RYDER KLEPTOMANIA

A Psychological Evaluation of Winona Ryder Symptomatic Of Kleptomania

The University of Michigan

Winona Laura Ryder (formerly Horowitz) is an Academy Award-nominated and Golden Globe-winning actress. She was born in 1971 in Olmsted County, Minnesota and was named after the nearby city of Winona (Wikipedia, 2007). She was born to author and mother Cindy Horowitz whose family was from Romania and father Michael Horowitz whose family immigrated to America from Russia (Wikipedia, 2007). Winona also had a younger brother Yuri, an older half-brother Jubal, and an older half-sister Sunyata (Wikipedia, 2007). Her father was an atheist and her mother a Buddhist (Tiscali Film Biographies, 2007). Ryder was brought up in a bohemian, intellectual, alternative lifestyle and her parents were friends with many notable people. Her middle name Laura was borrowed from her parents' good friend Laura Huxley, the wife of the famous Brave New World author Aldous Huxley (Wikipedia, 2007). Her godfather is psychedelic guru and former Harvard Professor Timothy Leary, and other family friends included beat poets Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti whose famous works were often on the subject of drug experiences (Tiscali Film Biographies, 2007).

When Winona Ryder was seven years old, her family relocated to a commune called Rainbow in northern California where they lived with seven other families on 300 acres of land (Tiscali Film Biographies, 2007). The remote property had no electricity or television, thus Ryder was an avid reader when she was a young child, especially relating to the novel *The Catcher In The Rye* (Wikipedia, 2007). However, her mother, who later became a producer of educational movies, often showed films for the children in the commune barn, sparking her daughter's interest in acting (Tiscali Film Biographies, 2007).

When Ryder was ten years old, her family moved to the Bay Area in northern California, where they enrolled her in public school (Wikipedia, 2007). In her first week at school, she was battered by fellow classmates who thought she was an effeminate, homosexual boy. Both as a result of that trauma and her difficulty acclimating after commune life, Ryder was home-schooled (Tiscali, 2007). During this period, her parents allowed her to enroll at the American Conservatory Theatre and she expressed her seriousness about a film career (Tiscali, 2007). Success came early for Winona Ryder as she took on many roles at a young age, including: Lydia in *Beetlejuice*, Veronica in *Heathers*, and Myra in *Great Balls of Fire* to name a few.

Ryder became romantically involved with Johnny Depp for three years and when the relationship came to an end, Ryder pulled out of her role in *Godfather 3*, citing exhaustion and illness brought on by overwork. Then because she was suffering from chronic insomnia, she booked herself into a psychiatric clinic for five days. After several more movies made, Ryder dropped out of the movie *Lily and the Secret Planting* in 2001 and visited Dr. Jules Lusman for chronic pain from scoliosis and an elbow injury from *Mr. Deeds*. Lusman, known for his dealing with celebrities and prescribed an opiate-based painkiller, had been under investigation for over-prescribing such drugs. In December, Ryder was caught shoplifting at Saks Fifth Avenue on Wilshire Boulevard for items valued at \$5,560 after having used scissors to cut off the security tags. When she was searched, the police found she was carrying Demerol, Endocet, Vicodin, and Vicoprofen. She was sentenced with 480 hours of community service and three years' probation, and was ordered to pay \$3,700 in fines and \$6,355 in restitution (Tiscali, 2007).

I hypothesize that Winona Ryder has the psychological disorder of kleptomania. Kleptomania is a compulsive conduct disorder whose symptoms include recurrent failure to resist impulses to steal objects, which are not needed for personal use or for their monetary value (Wikipedia, 2007). The diagnostic criteria defined in the DSM-IV emphasizes that although individuals with kleptomania experience a sense of tension immediately before committing a theft, and experience pleasure, gratification, or relief afterwards, the stealing is not committed to express anger or vengeance, is not in response to a delusion or hallucination, and cannot be explained by another psychological disorder such as a manic episode (DSM, 1994). All of these symptoms are necessary for diagnosis.

The exact cause of kleptomania is unknown, but there are many theories and speculations. Because of the lack of psychological well-being (particularly mood disorders, substance abuse disorders, and eating disorders) in many kleptomaniacs, it has been theorized that stealing behavior is an attempt to self-treat underlying depression and/or driven by a desire to account for an actual or anticipated loss (Scott, 2003). It was obvious by the career consequences following the tumultuous breakup of Ryder with Depp that this loss affected her psyche. It was also indisputable that Ryder was battling drug abuse or possibly dependence at the time of the theft, which appears to be a risk factor. Also, psychoanalytic theory traces kleptomania to childhood neglect. Ryder's upbringing in the commune Rainbow may have left her with a sense of abandonment from her biological parents, which also may be an explanation for her proposed kleptomania.

The classic kleptomaniac has been described by Goldman (1991) as a 35-year old woman who has been caught several times for stealing things that she does not need and can easily afford. As a 30-year-old woman at the time of the incident, Winona Ryder fits this description rather well. This paper hypothesizes that Winona Ryder developed kleptomania and thus needless stealing behavior as a result of her predisposing cause of childhood neglect and precipitating causes of both the deterioration of her relationship and opiate abuse or dependence.

## **Methods**

The research done for the purpose of this case study was all archival—or using previously compiled information to answer research questions. The well-known shoplifting incident involving Winona Ryder in 2002 sparked my interest; however, I had to evaluate the difference between regular thefts and shoplifting with the psychological disorder. I first referenced kleptomania in general to explore the difference between shoplifting or theft and kleptomania. For these references, I used the following sources: Wikipedia, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV, C. Scott's article entitled Kleptomania (2003), and M.J. Goldman's article entitled Kleptomania: making sense of nonsense (1991). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV was particularly important in deciphering the diagnostic criteria necessary to diagnose kleptomania, which indicated that a large factor was the lack of need in stealing behavior. I then used the following references to obtain information about Winona Ryder's personal history and background: Wikipedia and Tiscali Film Biographies. Finally, I used Runyan's article (1981) in order to evaluate other interpretations of Ryder's stealing behavior. Further research is

suggested in order to determine whether or not Winona Ryder is definitively afflicted with kleptomania.

## **Results**

The first aspect of the hypothesis to be evaluated is the predisposing factor of childhood neglect in the case of Winona Ryder. The effects of childhood neglect are considered to have long-term effects on psychological development. It is also true that co-morbidity in impulse control disorders under which kleptomania is classified. These disorders are classified by an individual's willingness to reap short-term benefits at the expense of long-term losses and are considered related to Obsessive Compulsive Disorders, likely due to the fact that kleptomaniacs experience recurrent thoughts paired with urges to steal (Wikipedia, 2007). Ryder's alternative upbringing at the Rainbow commune suggests that although she may have ultimately been cared for, the care was not necessarily by her biological parents and the style of upbringing may have been otherwise stressful. Ryder recalled later that in the commune "everyone walked around naked," and "It wasn't a nightmare, but it was no Utopia as a child, in northern California it gets really freezing in the winters. We had no electricity, no running water. Everyone was looking after everyone's else's kids and sometimes I just wanted my own family" (Tiscali, 2007). This quote suggests that she also may not have always been afforded necessities that most children in the United States have readily available.

This impulsive behavior is also consistent with the fact that Ryder was clearly dealing with a drug abuse or dependence problem at the time of the theft. It was reported that she had filled up to 37 prescriptions written by 20 doctors, using six different aliases, in a three-year period (Wikipedia, 2007). This information leads one to believe that there

were many psychological issues that may have been co-morbid with her kleptomania—a pattern that is typically seen with the disorder. A likely stressor that may have brought on depression in Ryder was her breakup with Depp. Ryder took the demise difficultly, allowing for it to interfere with her career (as she dropped out of *Godfather Three*), and also forcing her to check into a psychiatric clinic (citing insomnia). Unlike many cases of shoplifting, the stealing associated with kleptomania is not usually planned or motivated in the slightest by need or in some cases desire. In kleptomania, it seems that the act of stealing is more important than the items themselves. Because Winona Ryder was a successful actress who was making approximately three million dollars per movie at the time of the crime, it is obvious that need was not a factor in her decision to steal. In addition, approximately 80% of kleptomaniacs are women, making gender a risk factor for kleptomania.

Although we are unable to definitively determine how Winona Ryder felt immediately before and after committing the theft, we can presume that the tension/pleasure diagnostic criteria are plausible. It is definitive that she was unable to resist urges to steal as evidenced by the monetary extent of items stolen. Ryder's reaction to the incident also did not indicate that her stealing behavior was committed to express anger or vengeance, nor can it be explained by a manic or other psychotic episode. The defense claimed that the incident was a “misunderstanding” and that she was just carrying items between the store departments. This story ultimately failed and does not discount the possibility of a kleptomania diagnosis.

## **Discussion**

Because the diagnostic criterion for defining kleptomania is rather vague and has high generality potential, I would suggest more research on the topic of Winona Ryder. For example, a diagnostic test could be given to Ryder. Diagnosis is typically done using the Structured Clinical Interview for Kleptomania (SCI-K), the semi-structured Minnesota Impulsive Disorders Interview (MIDI), or the Irresistible Impulse Test in legal proceedings (Scott, 2003). Archival research seemed to indicate that the Irresistible Impulse Test was not given to Ryder, although she faced severe criminal charges. Both Winona Ryder's predisposing and precipitating factors strongly point in the direction of the diagnosis of kleptomania, yet it is difficult to prove the hypothesis without utilizing further research.

Other explanations or interpretations are possible as well. For example, it could be that Ryder ingested so many intoxicating prescription opiates at the time of the incident that her judgment was altered, or her body control lost. A weakness of the diagnosis of kleptomania is that reliability and validity may be affected by the fact that kleptomania is often co-morbid with other mental health illnesses, including: mood disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and alcohol and substance-abuse disorders. However, this creates a predicament because in order for kleptomania to be diagnosed, an individual's stealing behavior cannot be explained by another disorder. Runyan (1981) makes the point that for every action, there are many possible explanations of which possibly all are true, none are true, or some are true. For example, in this case, it is possible that the effect of opiate contributed to Ryder's stealing behavior, but did not necessarily cause it. There are always complicated interactions that



determine decision-making and to ascribe explanations from an outside perspective is extremely difficult.

It is also possible that she did not lose control of her impulses, but expected that her celebrity status would skate her through any trouble that she may encounter following her actions. If Ryder's thefts were a conscious choice motivated by desire then her condition may not be kleptomania after all. In kleptomania, it seems that the act of stealing is more important than the items themselves. Persons with kleptomania have been known to leave stolen goods unopened, throw them away, donate them to charities, or return to the stores to apologize and atone for their behavior. In addition, because many kleptomaniacs know that their condition is out of their own control and is in conflict with their own self-image, they may call stores before they arrive to warn the clerks of their condition (Scott, 2003). It would be interesting to evaluate whether or not Ryder fits into this criteria or not, but it is impossible to know since she was caught in the act. The absence of this information is definitely a shortcoming of the case study.

Various treatment options exist for kleptomania, although it is generally viewed by professionals as one of the more persistent mental health illnesses. Treatment is generally designed to address underlying psychological issues that are contributing to stealing behavior. This may explain the absence of future stealing episodes by Ryder. For example, if she sought mental health help for her possible depression over Depp, it is possible that her symptoms would disappear as well. For example, medical records of Ryder from the perspective of archival research are unavailable, and thus it is impossible to tell if she sought help from Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, for example. I

feel as if Ryder's history and textbook predisposing and precipitating causes over-rules other possible explanations.

### Works Cited

- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fourth edition*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Goldman, M.J. (1991). Kleptomania: making sense of the nonsensical. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148, 986-996.
- Kleptomania. (2007, April 17). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 21:21, April 17, 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kleptomania&oldid=119565219>
- Runyan, W.M. (1981). Why did Van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40(6):1070-7.
- Scott, C. (2003). Kleptomania. In Hales & Yudofsky. (Eds.) *The American Psychiatric Publishing Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry* (pp. 685-688), New York: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Tiscali Film and TV. (2007). Winona Ryder Biography. Retrieved April 20 2007, from the World Wide Web; [http://www.tiscali.co.uk/entertainment/film/biographies/winona\\_ryder\\_biog.html](http://www.tiscali.co.uk/entertainment/film/biographies/winona_ryder_biog.html)
- Winona Ryder. (2007, April 17). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 21:21, April 17, 2007, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kleptomania&oldid=119565219>