

Patterns Among School Shooters: Body-Related Issues and the Military

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In my book *School Shooters: Understanding High School, College, and Adult Perpetrators*, I noted numerous patterns among the perpetrators of rampage school attacks. I hypothesized that several of these may be interconnected. For example, many shooters faced biological challenges to their identities, and because most of them were male, these biological issues may have constituted challenges to their masculinity. In addition, many shooters had relatives who served in the military or law enforcement who may have served as role models for masculinity. Furthermore, many shooters aspired to careers in the military or law enforcement, perhaps as a way to establish a sense of manhood. Finally, many shooters failed in their military aspirations, which may have had a devastating impact on their identities.

This document expands the research on these issues, going beyond what was presented in my book. The information is presented as follows: first, details about each shooter are provided for each of the topics, then a final chart tallies the results for each shooter across the different domains. The shooters are grouped by population: secondary school shooters, college shooters, and aberrant adult shooters (see my book *School Shooters* or the “About the Site” page at www.schoolshooters.info for an explanation of these categories). Within each population, they are listed in chronological order of attack.

The information under discussion here was not always available for all shooters. This was particularly true of older shooters whose childhoods were more distant, and especially for those shooters who immigrated to the U.S. or who committed their attacks in other countries. Tracking down information about their families and their early years was often not possible.

P.L. · September 2015

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BODY-RELATED ISSUES

Deciding what to include as a biological challenge is subjective. A bad case of acne may be far more devastating in its impact on self-esteem than a more medically significant birth defect or medical condition. Someone who is teased for being overweight, even if he is not particularly overweight, may take the teasing to heart and suffer terribly from it. Thus, it wasn't simply a matter of someone crossing a certain threshold for being too short or too heavy, but of also considering if the issue caused him to be mocked or to feel insecure. Some issues, such as bedwetting and stuttering, may not be clearly (or solely) biological, but perhaps belong in this section. Wetting the bed as an adolescent or adult may be humiliating or shameful, and stuttering often results in being mocked.

On a different note, physical injury or severe pain can contribute to frustration or depression. For example, Robert Flores was in a car accident not long before his attack and cited his physical suffering as a contributing factor in his depression.

Besides medical conditions, two other factors may have been challenges to shooters' identities/masculinity. The first is that several shooters were gay and were taunted about this, resulting in public humiliation. The second is that several shooters were molested by older males as children or adolescents, and this caused private humiliation and shame. Both these factors, though not birth defects, illnesses, or other medical problems, were issues related to their bodies that made it difficult to feel good about themselves as males.

For example, Mitchell Johnson was outwardly a good “physical specimen.” Girls thought he was cute and he was a successful athlete, playing on three school sports teams. Because an older boy raped him repeatedly over a four-year period, however, Johnson experienced a devastating violation of his bodily integrity and may have felt “damaged” by the abuse.

(Note: Some shooters were called “gay” who were not actually gay; this may have been a blow to their identity/masculinity, but it was not rooted in their bodies and is thus not included here.)

SECONDARY SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Michael Slobodian	Short; wore platform shoes to compensate
Robert Poulin	Chest deformity Poor eyesight that prevented him from being a pilot like his father Late onset of puberty Homosexual interest
Brenda Spencer	Short: reportedly 5’1”, 85 lbs Incapacitating menstrual cramps
James Kearbey	Slight build; often teased
Eric Houston	Very sick as infant with meningitis, encephalitis, and severe pneumonia Delayed developmental milestones Molested by teacher Homosexual experimentation that was very confusing and disturbing to him
Scott Pennington	Slow to develop physically Reportedly picked on because he was short Stuttered
Toby Sincino	Extremely short: less than 5’ tall at age 16; picked on
Jamie Rouse	Reportedly bullied in elementary school because he was short
Barry Loukaitis	Short / thin: reportedly teased about his body
Evan Ramsey	Childhood sexual abuse
Luke Woodham	Reportedly teased as child for being overweight and wearing thick glasses
Michael Carneal	Short: 5’2”; late onset of puberty; teased for being short
Andrew Golden	Very short and thin: reportedly barely 4’ tall
Mitchell Johnson	Brutally raped by older male peer repeatedly over four years Reportedly teased for being chubby as a child
Andrew Wurst	Bedwetting in adolescence
Kip Kinkel	Slow physical development as child; reportedly upset that he was short High school: put himself down for being small and unathletic; wanted to be big and strong
Eric Harris	Chest deformity resulting in two surgeries Birth defect in legs Hated his looks Teased for having a big head on a skinny body
Dylan Klebold	Wrote in journal about not being athletic and his envy and hatred of athletes
Nathaniel Brazill	Asthma that kept him from playing sports
Charles “Andy” Williams	Reportedly teased for being thin, short, and pale; called “anorexic” and “albino”

Jason Hoffman	Had a bad skin condition that sometimes oozed blood Overweight
John Jason McLaughlin	Reactive airway disease in infancy and later Short Severe acne
Jeffrey Weise	Overweight as adolescent
Alvaro Castillo	Wondered if he might be gay or bisexual
Eric Hainstock	Childhood sexual abuse Identified as gay; reported being harassed about his sexuality
Asa Coon	Short Markedly overweight
Pekka-Eric Auvinen	Reportedly suffered because he was so short
Tim Kretschmer	Possibly short as a child; nicknamed "Mini-Timmi"
Bryan Oliver	Teased for being short Identified as gay
Jose Reyes	Birth trauma: "almost died at birth;" umbilical cord around neck; may have lost oxygen Delayed speech, stuttered; received speech therapy
Jaylen Fryberg	Diabetic

COLLEGE SHOOTERS

Charles Whitman	Testicular surgery in 11th grade Fear of sterility as adult Overweight as adult: Boy Scouts in his troop called him "Porky"
Robert Smith	"Weak, slow and clumsy" Short Uncoordinated: could not tie shoes or ride bicycle
Mark Houston	Brain damage from car accident as a child
Gang Lu	Short: reportedly 5'4", 130 lbs
Valery Fabrikant	Short: estimated height of 5'4" Fear of sterility
Wayne Lo	Short: reportedly 5'5"; tried to prove how tough he was
Peter Odighizuwa	Shoulder, neck and eardrum injuries from car accident (as adult) Knee, hip, and back injuries from prior car accident (as adult)
Robert Flores	Back pain from car accident (as adult)
Seung Hui Cho	A sickly child As adult, tried to bulk up by working out; despite this, autopsy noted an unusual lack of muscle
Steven Kazmierczak	Bedwetting Experimented with homosexuality (confusion about sexuality) Had been very overweight
Matti Saari	Slow to grow as an infant; as adult below average in height
Chris Harper-Mercer	In adolescence: was short, overweight ("chunky"), and had acne

ABERRANT ADULT SHOOTERS

Larry Harmon	“Slight handicap as the result of a bout of polio as a child”
Laurie Dann	Very short as a child Corrective surgery on ears and nose
James Wilson	Reportedly ridiculed as a child for being overweight Engaged in male prostitution as teen; may have been underage and thus this would constitute molestation
Patrick Purdy	Molested (engaged in male prostitution as young teen) Identified as gay and complained of harassment
Marc Lépine	Cruelly mocked for severe acne
Duane Morrison	May have been victim of childhood sexual abuse
Wellington de Oliveira	Mocked due to a limp
Adam Lanza	Delayed speech Odd gait, not well coordinated Extreme sensory sensitivities Possible homosexual and pedophilic fantasies Extraordinarily thin: 6’ tall, only 112 lbs
Elliot Rodger	Very upset about being short; tried to make himself taller by stretching himself Weak, uncoordinated, unathletic

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RELATIVES IN THE MILITARY OR LAW ENFORCEMENT

As noted above, I hypothesize that some school shooters were interested in the military as a way to achieve manhood. This may have been particularly important to those who experienced themselves as having damaged masculinity through the various body-related issues presented above. Having parents who served in the military may have created other dynamics than solely being role models for masculinity (though not every family member who served was male, virtually all of them were). For example, military families often relocate frequently, which uproots the children, adding stress to their lives. Or if a relative served in combat he may have been traumatized, which in turn could have created distress within the family. In most cases, however, these do not seem to have been factors. Thus, the focus here is on the possible connections between body-related issues, military role models in the family, military obsession and/or aspirations, and the frequent thwarting of the shooters’ ambitions.

Note: several shooters outside of the U.S. very likely had relatives who served because in some countries military service is essentially mandatory. Thus, the German, Finnish, and other international shooters may have had family members in the military. They are not included here because I have not seen this confirmed. In addition, however, the dynamic may not be the same for compulsory service as for those who choose it as a career. Finally, those who were called up to mandatory service presumably served prior to having children so that their children (the shooters) did not grow up on military bases or seeing their parents or other relatives in the role of soldiers.

SECONDARY SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Robert Poulin	Father: pilot in Canadian Air Force Grandfather: military Relatives on both sides: military
Brenda Spencer	Father: Navy

[Brent Fleming] ^a	[Father: police officer]
James Kearbey	Father: Vietnam veteran/former marine
Evan Ramsey	Father: Navy
Andrew Golden	Grandfather: fish and game warden
Mitchell Johnson	Mother: corrections officer
Eric Harris	Father: pilot in Air Force Maternal grandfather: military
Seth Trickey	Father: U.S. Navy (Mother: Veterans Affairs) ^b Great-uncle #1: U.S. Navy Great-uncle #2: U.S. Navy Great-uncle #3: law enforcement Other more distant relatives: military
Nathaniel Brazill	Uncle: military
Charles “Andy” Williams	Mother: U.S. Army Father: U.S. Army (and later lab technician in Naval Medical Center) ^b Grandfather: military Great-grandfather: Marines
John Jason McLaughlin	Father: sergeant in county sheriff’s department
Jeffrey Weise	Paternal grandfather: police officer Grandfather’s brother: Navy Grandfather’s brother: Army
Robert Butler, Jr.	Father: police detective
Mason Campbell	Uncle: Army Reserve, National Guard
Jared Padgett	Older brother: U.S. Army Reserve “a large family with a history of military service”
Jaylen Fryberg	Grandfather: U.S. Marine Corps

COLLEGE SHOOTERS

Valery Fabrikant	Father: reportedly physician in Russian Army
Gang Lu	(Mother: military hospital – the family lived in the compound) ^b
Wayne Lo	Father: pilot in Taiwanese Air Force
Robert Flores	Father: police officer
One Goh	Brother: U.S. Army

ABERRANT ADULT SHOOTERS

Robert Smith	Father: retired Major in Air Force Reserve
Patrick Purdy	Father: military
Marc Lépine	Uncle: Algerian military Father: possibly in Algerian military
Jillian Robbins	Father: Army Reserve

a Fleming supported Spencer’s homicidal intentions without participating in the shooting.

b A connection to the military, rather than military service.

Kimveer Gill	Family served in military in India
Duane Morrison	Father: military
Charles Roberts IV	Father: police officer
Jiverly Wong	Father: South Vietnamese Army
Adam Lanza	Uncle: Marines and law enforcement
Aaron Ybarra	Grandfather: U.S. Army
Myron May	Father: Navy Uncle: Marines

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MILITARY ASPIRATION / OBSESSION AND OUTCOME

Though the title of this section uses the word “military,” the chart includes law enforcement and security work, too. What these professions have in common is the use of firearms. They may also all be perceived as typically masculine fields, and thus appeal to the male shooters who were insecure about their masculinity. There could, of course, have been other factors in their interest in the military. Perhaps they wanted to serve their country, follow a family tradition of military service, or channel their interest in weapons or violence into a socially acceptable profession. Such interests are not mutually exclusive of a desire to establish their masculinity.

SECONDARY SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Michael Slobodian	Aspired to military and joined local militia before his attack
Robert Poulin	Applied to an officer training program but was rejected as too immature
Brenda Spencer	Wanted to become a sniper
Eric Houston	Wanted to join the army but failed to graduate high school and thus could not apply
Kip Kinkel	Wanted to go into law enforcement, be on bomb squad; committed attack before he was old enough to do so
Eric Harris	Tried to enlist in the Marines but was rejected ^c
Seth Trickey	Military aspirations, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Nathaniel Brazill	Aspired to join police, military, or Secret Service, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Jason Hoffman	Rejected by the Navy for being too heavy, having a skin condition, and an assault and battery charge
John McLaughin	Wanted to be military explosives expert, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Jeffrey Weise	Military aspirations, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Alvaro Castillo	Joined the National Guard but hated it; after a suicide attempt, he was able to obtain a discharge
Sebastian Bosse	Dreamed of military career; committed attack before enlisting
Douglas Chanthabouly	After his attack, told an officer he was thinking of joining the police

^c Mrs. Harris asked the recruiting officer if the fact that Eric was taking Luvox would prevent him from being accepted. The officer said he would have to look into this. After the attack, he said that he had tried to reach Eric to tell him that he was not accepted due to the medication, but was unable to do so and a few days later the attack occurred. At least two friends, however, reported that Eric had told them he had been rejected. If these reports are accurate, then it appears that Eric knew or assumed he would be rejected.

Pekka-Eric Auvinen	Military service was deferred due to mental health reasons; not clear if he had aspirations or was simply called to serve
Tim Kretschmer	No military aspiration; worked to get out of mandatory service
Robert Butler	Aspired to be a police officer, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Bryan Oliver	Aspired to join U.S. Army, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Jose Reyes	Aspired to join police or Marines, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist
Karl Pierson	Aspired to go to West Point or Air Force academy; he started the application process with at least West Point, but West Point closed his file due to lack of activity; he may have given up due to poor grades and disciplinary history at school
Jared Padgett	Aspired to join the military and participated in Junior ROTC, but committed attack before he was old enough to enlist

COLLEGE SHOOTERS

Charles Whitman	Joined the Marines but got himself discharged after being court martialed
Edward Allaway	Joined the Marines but did not last long; he was dishonorably discharged
Valery Fabrikant	May have served in Russian army, but if so, this was presumably mandatory
Wayne Lo	Obsessed with marines; had usmc (United States Marine Corps) shaved in his hair
Frederick Davidson	Served in military; no known problems
Robert Flores	Served 11 years; demoted; discharge status unknown
Biswanath Halder	Reportedly attended military school in India and served in India's military corps of electrical and mechanical engineers
Steven Kazmierczak	Joined the Army but was discharged after it was discovered he had lied about his mental health history Shortly before his attack, he tried to enlist in the Navy
Matti Saari	Joined the military but was recommended for discharge, which he wanted; he lasted less than two months
Chris Harper-Mercer	Enlisted in the army, but after five weeks was discharged following a suicide attempt

ABERRANT ADULT SHOOTERS

Patrick Purdy	Had military aspirations but never applied, perhaps because he knew he would be rejected because of his many arrests, alcoholism, and drug abuse
Marc Lépine	Rejected by the Canadian Army as “unsuitable” or “asocial”
Kevin Newman	Committed attack shortly after “less than honorable discharge” from Navy
Jillian Robbins	Discharged from the Army Reserve for failing to complete high school
Kimveer Gill	Enrolled in a military leadership course but dropped out – or was discharged – after a month
Duane Morrison	Served in the Navy for 6 months; discharged a month after going AWOL
Stephen Morgan	Served successfully in Navy
Bruco Eastwood	Wanted to enlist, but failed GED so he couldn't; he went on rampage shortly after this
Brendan O'Rourke	Wanted to be a security guard; got licensed, got gun, but didn't get a job
Wellington de Oliveira	Wanted to be a terrorist
Adam Lanza	Wanted to enlist in Marines but mother talked him out of it; he took this harder than she expected

Note: The word “military” is used in the chart, but as noted above, this includes law enforcement and related fields. The dash is used to indicate those shooters with military aspirations who committed their attacks when they were too young to enlist.

Name, Age	Body Issues	Family Military Service	Military Aspirations / Obsession	Thwarted Ambitions / Failure
SECONDARY SCHOOL SHOOTERS				
Michael Slobodian, 16	X		X	—
Robert Poulin, 18	X	X	X	X
Brenda Spencer, 16	X	X	X	—
James Kearbey, 14	X	X	X	
Eric Houston, 20	X		X	X
Scott Pennington, 17	X			
Toby Sincino, 16	X			
Jamie Rouse, 17	X			
Barry Loukaitis, 14	X			
Evan Ramsey, 16	X	X		
Luke Woodham, 16	X			
Michael Carneal, 14	X			
Andrew Golden, 11	X	X		
Mitchell Johnson, 13	X	X		
Andrew Wurst, 14	X			
Kip Kinkel, 15	X		X	—
Eric Harris, 18	X	X	X	X
Dylan Klebold, 17	X			
Seth Trickey, 13		X	X	—
Nathaniel Brazill, 13	X	X	X	—
Andy Williams, 15	X	X	X	—
Jason Hoffman, 18	X		X	X
John McLaughlin, 15	X	X	X	—
Jeffrey Weise, 16	X	X	X	—
Alvaro Castillo, 18	X		X	X
Eric Hainstock, 15	X			
Sebastian Bosse, 18			X	
Douglas Chanthabouly, 18			X	—
Asa Coon, 14	X			

Name, Age	Body Issues	Family Military Service	Military Aspirations / Obsession	Thwarted Ambitions / Failure
Pekka-Eric Auvinen, 18	X		?	X
Tim Kretschmer, 17	X			
Robert Butler, Jr., 17		X	X	—
Bryan Oliver, 16	X		X	—
Jose Reyes, 12	X		X	—
Karl Pierson, 18			X	X
Mason Campbell, 12		X		
Jared Padgett, 15		X	X	—
Jaylen Fryberg, 15	X	X		

COLLEGE SHOOTERS

Charles Whitman, 25	X		X	X
Edward Allaway, 37			X	X
Mark Houston, 19	X			
Gang Lu, 28	X			
Valery Fabrikant, 52	X	X		
Wayne Lo, 18	X	X	X	
Frederick Davidson, 36			X	
Peter Odighizuwa, 43	X			
Robert Flores, 41	X	X	X	?
Biswanath Halder, 62			X	
Seung Hui Cho, 23	X			
Steven Kazmierczak, 27	X		X	X
Matti Saari, 22	X		?	X
One Goh, 43		X		
Chris Harper-Mercer, 26	X		X	X

ABERRANT ADULT SHOOTERS

Robert Smith, 18	X	X		
Larry Harmon, 21	X			
Laurie Dann, 30	X			
James Wilson, 19	X			
Patrick Purdy, 24	X	X	X	X
Marc Lépine, 25	X	X	X	X
Kevin Newman, 29			X	X

Name, Age	Body Issues	Family Military Service	Military Aspirations / Obsession	Thwarted Ambitions / Failure
Jillian Robbins, 19		X	X	X
Kimveer Gill, 25		X	X	X
Duane Morrison, 53	X	X	X	X
Charles Roberts IV, 32		X		
Jiverly Wong, 41		X		
Stephen Morgan, 29			X	
Bruco Eastwood, 32			X	X
Brendan O'Rourke, 41			X	X
Wellington de Oliveira, 23	X		X	
Adam Lanza, 20	X	X	X	X
Elliot Rodger, 22	X			
Aaron Ybarra, 26		X		
Myron May, 31		X		