
Rampage School Shooters

A Typology

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A number of researchers have sought to identify the features that school shooters have in common in terms of family life, personalities, histories, and behaviors. This article examines the cases of 10 rampage school shooters in an effort to find out not only how they are alike, but also how they differ. Based on available information, these youths are categorized into three types: traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic. Out of the 10 shooters discussed, three were traumatized, five were psychotic, and two were psychopathic. The three traumatized shooters all came from broken homes with parental substance abuse and parental criminal behavior. They all were physically abused and two were sexually abused outside of the home. The five psychotic shooters had schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, including schizophrenia and schizotypal personality disorder. They all came from intact families with no history of abuse. The two psychopathic shooters were neither abused nor psychotic. They demonstrated narcissism, a lack of empathy, a lack of conscience, and sadistic behavior. Most people who are traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic do not commit murder. Beyond identifying the three types of rampage shooters, additional factors are explored that may have contributed to the attacks. These include family structure, role models, and peer influence.

KEYWORDS *school shooters, adolescent mass murder, school violence, school shootings, psychopath*

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Although rampage school shootings are statistically rare, the magnitude of the events, as well as the mystery of what causes them, has resulted in widespread speculation about the perpetrators. Media coverage often focuses on social factors such as peer harassment and the influence of media violence. These factors, however, cannot explain school shootings. It is probably safe to say that students are picked on everyday in virtually every school in the country. Thus, peer harassment is common, but school shootings are rare. Similarly, millions of adolescents play violent video games and watch violent movies without becoming murderers. Trying to explain aberrant events by common-place behaviors is not a productive approach.

For a variety of reasons, however, this population is difficult to study. First, the sample size is extraordinarily small. Second, the perpetrators sometimes kill themselves, which limits researchers to a retrospective review of the perpetrators' lives, and/or interviews with people who knew the perpetrators. Third, in cases where the perpetrators are apprehended, they are not available to be part of a standardized assessment or research project. In addition, the prosecuting and defending legal teams often engage in a battle regarding the perpetrator's sanity. Thus, there tends to be contradictory evidence that is presented to serve the respective legal teams' agendas.

Finally, the definition of a *school shooting* or a *rampage school shooting* varies across researchers, resulting in somewhat different, but overlapping, populations being studied. Some researchers study student-perpetrated firearms deaths at school, whereas others focus on large-scale attacks. Newman (2004) defined rampage school shootings as involving students who attend (or formerly attended) the school where the attack takes place; occurring on a school-related "public stage" (i.e., in plain view of others); and involving multiple victims, at least some of whom were shot at random or as a symbol (e.g., a principal who represents the school). Other victims may have been targeted due to a grievance or perceived wrong. Rampage school shootings do not include shootings of specific individuals due to a conflict. For example, rival gang shootings, shootings resulting from conflicts over a drug deal, and so on, were not part of this study, even if they occurred on school grounds.

Despite the difficulties in studying school shooters, a number of studies have attempted to describe this population. McGee and DeBernardo (1999) studied 14 cases of adolescent mass murder and developed a profile for what they called "classroom avengers," whom they defined as adolescents who engage in school-related mass murder. The researchers concluded that such adolescents tend to be white males who are loners. These boys are interested in violence, but do not have histories of violent behavior. They tend to be depressed, with features of several personality disorders, including the paranoid, antisocial, and narcissistic.

In a study conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), O'Toole (2000) reviewed 14 cases of actual shootings and four cases of planned shootings that were stopped before they could be carried out. The study identified 47 descriptors that many shooters had in common, including 28 personality traits and behaviors, seven family dynamics, seven school dynamics, and five social dynamics. Not all the shooters had each of these features, but the identified dynamics were seen as constituting significant trends. A few of the common individual features included narcissism, bigotry,

alienation, poor anger management, fascination with violence, low self-esteem, and a lack of empathy.

Verlinden, Hersen, and Thomas (2000) published a review of risk factors among 10 perpetrators of what they called “multiple victim homicide” that occurred in American schools. As in the FBI study (O’Toole, 2000), the researchers examined several domains, including individual, family, school/peers, and societal/environmental factors. Prominent factors included a history of aggression, uncontrolled anger, depression and suicidal ideation, discipline problems, and feeling rejected and picked on.

Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, and Gray (2001) reviewed 37 adolescent mass murderers, including eight who were classified as “classroom avengers,” and listed traits and behaviors they shared. The researchers found that school shooters often were bullied, but did not bully others. They were preoccupied with weapons and fantasy. Many had histories of substance abuse. Most were not depressed and did not have histories of antisocial behaviors. Psychosis was rarely a factor among the adolescent mass murderers.

In a study conducted by the United States Secret Service and the Department of Education, Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, and Modzeleski (2002) reviewed 37 incidents of school violence involving 41 students from 1974 to 2000. The researchers found a number of commonalities among the perpetrators. Most of the shooters were depressed, felt persecuted, had grievances against at least one of their targets, and had an interest in violent entertainment. Most of the shooters did not have a history of drug abuse, prior violence or criminal behavior, or cruelty to animals.

Leary, Kowalski, Smith, and Phillips (2003) reviewed 15 school shootings and identified features that many of the shooters had in common. These factors included acute or chronic peer rejection, an interest in weapons and death, depression, poor impulse control, and sadistic tendencies.

Although these studies have provided valuable information, the focus on what school shooters have in common misses important ways in which they differ. For example, Verlinden et al. (2000) found that though most of the perpetrators had no histories of abuse, three of them had been abused. In fact, the family backgrounds of school shooters vary dramatically. This suggests that there may be different types of school shooters, with some coming from intact, functioning families and others coming from dysfunctional and abusive families.

Similarly, O’Toole (2000) concluded that shooters are often narcissistic and entitled, as well as having poor self-esteem. Though it is possible that the shooters’ narcissism is an attempt to compensate for their poor self-esteem, it is also possible that two different types of shooters are being described — those who are narcissistic and those who are not, with the latter having poor self-esteem.

Finally, Meloy et al.’s (2001) finding that most adolescent mass murderers were not psychotic means that some were psychotic. In fact, the case example of the classroom avenger that the article presented had paranoid delusions and auditory hallucinations. Again, this suggests that there are different types of shooters — those who are psychotic and those who are not.

The purpose of this article is to highlight important differences among school shooters. This article will present a typology consisting of three categories of rampage school shooters.

2 · METHOD

2.1 · PROCEDURE

The data-gathering process involved researching specific rampage school shooters in an effort to learn as much as possible about them. Particular emphasis was placed on what was known about the shooters prior to the shooting. As noted above, after the shootings there was often discrepant information presented by opposing legal teams, which raises doubts about its accuracy.

In some cases, however, psychiatric and psychological evaluations were conducted after the shootings that provided important information and appeared to be consistent enough to be considered reliable. In addition, in some of these cases, there was evidence that the symptoms in question had been noted prior to the shooting, and the post-shooting evaluations confirm and expand upon the earlier evidence.

The 10 shooters included in this analysis were chosen because of the amount of information available about them, as well as the consistency of the information. Other shooters, no matter how much publicity their attacks received, were excluded due to insufficient information for a meaningful analysis.

2.2 · SUBJECTS

The rampage school shooters investigated in this study include the following:

- Evan Ramsey, who killed two people and wounded two in Bethel, Alaska in 1997
- Michael Carneal, who killed three and wounded five in West Paducah, Kentucky in 1997
- Mitchell Johnson and Andrew Golden, who killed five and wounded 10 in Jonesboro, Arkansas in 1998
- Andrew Wurst, who killed one and wounded three in Edinboro, Pennsylvania in 1998
- Kip Kinkel, who killed four and wounded 25 in Springfield, Oregon in 1998
- Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who killed 13 and wounded 23 in Jefferson County, Colorado in 1999
- Jeffrey Weise, who killed nine and wounded seven in Red Lake, Minnesota in 2005
- Seung Hui Cho, who killed 32 and wounded 17 in Blacksburg, Virginia in 2007

3 · RESULTS

3.1 · THE TYPOLOGY

The 10 school shooters fall into three types or categories: traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic.

The traumatized shooters all came from broken homes. They suffered physical and/or sexual abuse. Each had at least one parent with substance abuse problems, and each had at least one parent with a criminal history.

Unlike the traumatized shooters, the psychotic shooters all came from intact families with no histories of abuse, parental substance abuse, or parental incarceration.

The psychotic shooters exhibited symptoms of either schizophrenia or schizotypal personality disorder, including paranoid delusions, delusions of grandeur, and auditory hallucinations.

The psychopathic shooters also came from intact families with no histories of abuse or significant family dysfunction. They demonstrated narcissism, a lack of empathy, a lack of conscience, and sadistic behavior.

Each of the 10 shooters will be briefly presented within the relevant category of the typology.

3.2 · TRAUMATIZED

3.2.1 · *Evan Ramsey, age 16*

Evan committed a school shooting in Bethel, Alaska in 1997. His life prior to the shooting was markedly stressful (Fainaru, 1998, October 18). When Evan was seven years old, his father went to a newspaper office with at least two guns because the paper had refused to publish a letter he wrote. The father chained the doors of the building shut, set off smoke grenades, fired his weapons, and held the publisher hostage. He went to jail for 10 years. Evan's mother became alcoholic while the father was in prison. She moved in with a series of violent, abusive men. Evan and his brothers were removed from her care due to neglect. Evan was placed in a series of 10 foster homes in a two-year period. In one of these foster homes, he was physically and sexually abused.

Evan's rampage was initially planned as a suicide (Fainaru, 1998, October 19). He wanted to go to school and kill himself. Two of his friends talked him into killing other people. They showed him how to use a shotgun and gave him names of people he should shoot. Afterwards, both friends were charged for their roles in the attack. From what is known about Evan, there is no indication of either psychopathy or psychosis. Rather, he was a traumatized child who planned to kill himself, and was influenced by others to commit murder.

3.2.2 · *Mitchell Johnson, age 13*

Mitchell Johnson, along with Andrew Golden (discussed below) committed a school shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas in 1998. The information presented about him in this section comes from extensive work done by Newman (2004). Mitchell came from a fragmented family. Though the attack occurred in Arkansas, Mitchell had lived most of his life in Minnesota. His father reportedly drank and was a tough disciplinarian. He was described as mean-tempered and explosive. He reportedly punched holes in walls and terrorized Mitchell. In addition to being physically abused at home, an older boy raped Mitchell repeatedly over a period of several years. The perpetrator threatened to kill Mitchell's grandmother if he told anyone, so Mitchell did not report the abuse until he was evaluated after the shooting.

According to Mitchell, the idea to commit the attack came from his friend, Andrew Golden. Andrew was also the dominant partner during the attack: Mitchell fired 5 shots, and Andrew fired 25.

Though Mitchell had problems with his temper and got into some minor trouble at

school, there is no indication that he had the features of a psychopath. Neither is there any indication that he ever experienced psychotic symptoms. He was a physically and sexually abused boy from an unstable family who was talked into being part of a school shooting by a friend.

3.2.3 · Jeffrey Weise, age 16

Jeffrey Weise grew up in Minneapolis and on the Ojibwa reservation in Red Lake, Minnesota. His parents were not married. Most of his first three years he lived with his father, then moved to his mother's. His mother was alcoholic and abusive. She hit him with a variety of objects and said hateful things to him (Hanners, 2005). She also became involved with men who mistreated Jeffrey. In addition to being physically abused, Jeffrey was locked out of the house, made to kneel in a corner for hours, and locked in closets (Zenere, 2005).

Jeffrey sustained two significant losses when he was six to eight years old (Connolly & Hedgpeth, 2005). First, his father committed suicide during an armed standoff with police. Second, Jeffrey's mother sustained significant brain damage in a car accident that required her to live at a rehabilitation facility.

Prior to the accident, his mother had married a man and had two children by him. Following the mother's brain damage, however, her husband left her and took their two children with him. He did not take Jeffrey (Hanners, 2005). Jeffrey had lost his father to suicide and his mother to brain damage; he also lost his stepfather and half-siblings. Due to his fragmented family, Jeffrey was in and out of foster care (Haga & Collins, 2005). As a teenager, he made a suicide attempt by slicing his wrist (Rave, 2005).

Jeffrey's best friend was his cousin Louis. He and Louis had exchanged emails for months regarding an attack at the school. Eventually, however, Jeffrey committed the rampage on his own. Nonetheless, Louis was charged for his involvement in the attack (Haga & Collins, 2005).

Like Evan Ramsey and Mitchell Johnson, Jeffrey was an abused boy with a traumatic family history and no indication of psychosis or psychopathy. Also, like Evan and Mitchell, Jeffrey had a friend who appears to have supported, if not encouraged, his plan to kill people at school.

3.3 · PSYCHOTIC

Unlike the traumatized shooters, the psychotic shooters came from stable homes with no histories of abuse. They had schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, including schizophrenia or schizotypal personality disorder.

3.3.1 · Michael Carneal, age 14

Michael was the son of loving parents who raised a daughter who was bright, talented, and socially successful. In contrast, Michael was socially awkward and struggled to find a peer group. He engaged in odd behavior, perhaps in an effort to be funny or to impress his peers, or perhaps because of an early onset of schizophrenia. His odd

behavior included wearing capes to school, drinking white correction fluid, setting off stink bombs, and drinking salad dressing (Newman, 2004).

After the shooting, Michael was evaluated by doctors for both the prosecution and defense. The experts for both legal teams concluded that Michael had “odd behaviors, paranoia, and trouble interpreting social interactions correctly” (Harding, Mehta, & Newman, 2003, p. 150). Michael reported auditory hallucinations, though his most prominent psychotic symptom was his paranoia (Harding et al., 2003).

Prior the shooting, his family was aware of Michael’s severe fears and anxiety (Newman, 2004). At age 14, he was afraid of sleeping in his room alone. He was afraid of monsters under his bed or strangers climbing through the windows. He thought demons were going to hurt him and/or his family. As a result, he often spent the night on a couch in the living room. At times, he smuggled kitchen knives into his bedroom for protection. When he entered the bathroom, he would yell, “I know you’re in there!” (Newman, 2004, p. 24) to alert the demons or monsters that he was aware of their presence. At times, he would navigate a room by moving from one piece of furniture to another without letting his feet touch the floor in order to avoid the monsters. In the bathroom, he would cover the vents in order to prevent snakes from entering (Newman, 2004). He also believed that a man with a chainsaw lived under the house and wanted to cut off his legs (Cornell, 2006).

Michael experienced an early onset of schizophrenia, including auditory hallucinations, paranoid delusions, and impaired social functioning.

3.3.2 · Andrew Wurst, age 14

Andrew committed a shooting at a school dinner-dance in Edinboro, Pennsylvania. The information in this section is from the research conducted by DeJong, Epstein, and Hart (2003). Like Michael Carneal, Andrew Wurst was unusually fearful, especially at night. His mother reported that Andrew had fears of monsters in his closet and under his bed. Each night, she had to make sure there was nobody under his bed or in the closet and leave a light on in his room. She often lay on the covers with him, talking to help him settle down.

When he was apprehended after the shooting, Andrew said, “I died four years ago. I’ve already been dead and I’ve come back. It doesn’t matter anymore. None of this is real” (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 73). A psychiatric evaluation after the shooting noted that Andrew thought he was real, but everyone else was unreal. He reportedly believed that people are “programmed to act and say what the government, mad scientists, or a psycho want them to say” (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 77). He said that people are given “time tablets” (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 77) that give them different levels of intelligence and different personalities. He also reportedly said that he had never found any real people, and that though he could think his own thoughts, everyone else was programmed.

Andrew reportedly believed that there was nothing wrong with killing his teacher because “he was already dead or unreal” (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 77). These bizarre thoughts reportedly began between ages eight and ten. Andrew expressed that he had to be wary of unreal people, because “they are going to screw me over” (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 78). He also reportedly thought that his parents were not really his parents.

He apparently believed that he was brought to them from his world when he was four years old.

Andrew's parents described what might be flattened affect, commenting that he did not show much emotion, and that they had never seen him angry. His father noted that Andrew had a "dark look," a "faraway look or a day-dreaming look" (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 85). In a note to a peer, Andrew made reference to being on the edge of insanity.

The post-shooting reports are consistent with Andrew's comments to police in the immediate aftermath of the shooting. In addition, there is evidence that Andrew had talked to a girl prior to the shooting about real and unreal people. Andrew reportedly told her "we are in reality in hospital beds being monitored and programmed by these mad scientists, and this world is not real for them. . . . The scientists watch over us to see what we're doing" (DeJong et al., 2003, p. 80). Thus, there are consistent indicators that Andrew was delusional.

In addition to delusions, there is evidence that Andrew experienced hallucinations. DeJong et al. (2003) quote a letter Andrew wrote to a friend in which he said, "the voices are coming again" (p. 77), but details about the voices are not known.

Andrew was a schizophrenic boy who heard voices and was lost in a world of complex delusions.

3.3.3 · Kip Kinkel, age 15

Kip murdered his father and mother in their home. The next day, he went to school and committed a rampage shooting in which he killed two peers and wounded 25 others.

A psychologist for the defense reported that Kip had a psychotic disorder with major paranoid symptoms that may have been severe enough to indicate early-onset schizophrenia (Lieberman, 2006). Lieberman summarized the psychologist's testimony, noting several of Kip's delusions. Kip was convinced that the Chinese were going to invade the United States. In order to prepare for this, Kip reportedly stored explosives in his home (explosives were found in the home following the shootings). Kip also believed that Disney was taking over the world, and apparently was convinced that the Disney dollar would have a picture of Mickey Mouse on it. Kip thought that perhaps the government had placed a computer chip in his head, and this chip broadcast the voices he heard. He also believed there was a man in the neighborhood who wanted to harm him; Kip was so afraid of him that he reportedly bought a gun to defend himself. There is no evidence of any such man in the area.

Kip reportedly had auditory hallucinations that began in sixth grade with three voices (Lieberman, 2006). The voices made derogatory comments to him, told him to hurt people, and sometimes spoke to each other about Kip. Though the voices were said to have scared and upset him, he reportedly was too embarrassed to tell anyone about them. There is school documentation that prior to the shooting Kip burst out in class with the comment "God damn these voices inside my head!" (Lieberman, 2006, p. 141) After the killings, Kip reported that he heard voices telling him to kill his father, as well as to kill people at school.

The Kinkel family had multiple cases of mental illness, including schizophrenia. Numerous relatives had been institutionalized, and some had exhibited suicidal or homicidal behavior (Lieberman, 2006).

When Kip was apprehended and questioned by the police, he was in a state of extreme distress. He was distraught over what he had done, but could not explain why he had done it, other than that he had to or because the voices told him to. Kip was neither an abused child nor a psychopath. He came from a family with significant mental illness on both sides, and experienced the early onset of schizophrenia.

3.3.4 · Dylan Klebold, age 17

Dylan teamed up with Eric Harris in the attack at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado. Dylan was not as flagrantly psychotic as the other psychotic school shooters. Until the release of his journal in July, 2006 there was little indication of disturbed thought processes. Also, whereas the other psychotic shooters appear to have been schizophrenic, Dylan appears to have had schizotypal personality disorder.

As is often the case with schizotypals, Dylan struck many people as odd. The thousands of interviews conducted by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO) in the wake of the attack contain numerous comments from Dylan's peers about his odd behavior, his greasy, dirty hair, his unusual clothes, and his general "goofiness" (JCSO, 1999, pp. 172, 444, 556, 785, 5,036, 7,231, 9,820, 16,408). He was markedly shy and socially awkward (Bartels & Crowder, 1999). He wrote about his social difficulties in his journal: "nobody accepting me even though I want to be accepted, me doing badly and being intimidated in any and all sports, me looking weird and acting *shy* — BIG problem" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,390).

Dylan's journal also provides evidence that his thought process was disturbed (JCSO, 1999, pp. 26,385–26,417). He misused language in a number of ways. He created neologisms, distorting actual words into words that do not exist. He had tangled grammar and odd passages of inarticulate content. This never became "word salad" as in the speech of schizophrenics, but given that Dylan was a bright young man, his misuse of language is noteworthy.

Dylan also had strange ideas that appear to have been delusions. His alienation was so extreme that he apparently saw himself as not being human. He wrote, "Being made a human without the possibility of *BEING* human" and "Humanity is the something I long for" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,397). He also viewed himself as a god-like being. For example, he wrote, "me is a god" and "I'd rather have nothing than be nothing / Some say godliness isn't nothing" (JCSO, 1999, 26,397). Elsewhere he wrote, "some god I am" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,400).

Dylan exhibited paranoia (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,390, 26,392). He thought that everyone in his life hated him and felt like he was being conspired against. He also wrote about being persecuted by God, interpreting simple events as a conspiracy against him. This did not seem to be a fixed delusion, however, but rather a transient response to particular events.

Dylan was not an abused child. Nor was he psychopathic. Dylan's odd presentation, social anxiety, mild paranoia, misuse of language, and fantasy/delusional thinking all suggest that he had schizotypal personality disorder.

Seung Hui Cho went on a rampage at Virginia Tech in 2007. He had a long history of social and emotional difficulties (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2007). From a young age, he was markedly anxious in social situations. He spoke little, even within his family. Despite this, he was an intelligent child who behaved well in school. During his years at college, his behavior was notable for negative symptoms of schizophrenia, including poverty of speech and affective flattening. Seung barely spoke, even when asked direct questions. He also showed almost no emotion of any kind.

When he did speak, he sometimes said things that suggested delusional thinking (Kleinfeld, 2007). He talked about having a supermodel from outer space as a girlfriend. Though he initially referred to her as imaginary, on at least one occasion he told his roommate that she was in their dorm room. Whether this was psychotic or an attempt at humor remains unclear. Similarly, Seung claimed that he knew Russian leader Vladimir Putin. He said that they grew up together in Russia. Seung also said that he had spent Thanksgiving vacation with Putin.

Seung's manifesto about his attack gave evidence of grandiose and paranoid delusions. The grandiosity was seen when he compared himself to Moses: "Like Moses, I split the sea and lead my people" (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18195423/>). He believed he was leading a mass movement of people and would go down in history as a great leader. His paranoia was seen in numerous comments about people trying to shed his blood and destroy him (Johnson, 2007). He believed that he was on the verge of annihilation and his attack was a response to attempts to destroy him.

Seung demonstrated two negative symptoms of schizophrenia: poverty of speech and affective flattening. He also exhibited positive symptoms of schizophrenia in the form of grandiose and paranoid delusions. His comments about his girlfriend from outer space and Vladimir Putin may have been further evidence of his delusional thinking.

3.4 · PSYCHOPATHIC

The psychopathic type is characterized by a lack of empathy, a sense of superiority and contempt for others, skill in impression management, pleasure in deceiving others, and sadistic delight in inflicting pain on humans and/or animals. The psychopathic shooters had intact families with no evidence of abuse or neglect and had no known psychotic symptoms.

There are shortcomings to the term psychopathic, especially when applied to children. First, it is not a diagnosis in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Second, using the work of Hare (1999) and Forth, Kosson, and Hare (2003) as a guide, some of the traits or behaviors associated with psychopathy either are not manifested in children or are difficult to assess. Despite these issues, however, the term *psychopathic* will be used. Though these children and adolescents might meet diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder, calling mass murderers conduct disordered seems inadequate. The diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder might be applicable, but as defined in *DSM-IV-TR*, it cannot be applied to people under the age of 18.

Andrew committed a school shooting with Mitchell Johnson, in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Psychopaths often present well, being likable and even charismatic. Hare (1999) refers to this as impression management, noting that even the cruelest of psychopaths can often put on a convincing veneer of sociability. A neighbor commented, “Andrew was a sweet child whenever his parents were around . . . but whenever he was away from his parents he was a little demon” (Newman, 2004, p. 40). As a result of his skill in impression management, “in his parents’ eyes, Andrew could do no wrong” (Fox, Roth, & Newman, 2003, p. 106).

Around the neighborhood, he was seen as belligerent and “mean-spirited” (Fox et al., 2003, p. 107). He was aggressive with girls and went around the neighborhood with a knife strapped to his leg. He frequently yelled at and threatened his peers. Several parents prohibited their children from playing with Andrew.

Andrew’s most disturbing behavior prior to the shooting involved his cruelty to animals (Newman, 2004). Newman recounts reports from those who knew Andrew, which included the following acts of cruelty: killing a cat by starving it in a barrel; pushing the heads of kittens through a chain-link fence; and shooting a cat. Andrew himself reported to staff in the detention center (following the school shooting) that he hated cats, shot bottle rockets at cats, tied a cat to a clothesline and shot BBs at it, shot other cats full of BBs, and slit the throats of cats.

This behavior could be included under several traits listed by Forth, Kosson, and Hare (2003) as indicating psychopathy: early behavior problems, stimulation seeking, lack of remorse, callousness/lack of empathy, and possibly impulsivity or poor anger control (it is not known if the cruelty was done in anger, if it was done for pleasure, or both).

Poor anger control was evident in his behavior with peers in the neighborhood, where he was known to curse and yell at them, and threaten to shoot them with his BB gun (Newman, 2004). A police officer heard Mitchell say that Andrew’s motivation for the shooting was that “[he] was mad at a teacher . . . He was tired of their crap” (Fox et al., 2003, p. 113). Committing murder because he was angry with teachers indicates extremely poor anger management.

Another indicator of psychopathy is serious criminal behavior (Forth, Kosson, & Hare, 2003). The school shooting itself is an obvious example of serious criminal behavior, especially keeping in mind that Andrew was 11 years old. His lack of empathy and callous disregard for human life was demonstrated earlier in the school year, when he got up on [a]¹ cafeteria table and said, “you are all going to die” (Fox et al., 2003, p. 111).

Another facet of psychopathy is a grandiose sense of self-worth. This is difficult to determine, but there is evidence that Andrew seemed to think that school rules did not apply to him. When a teacher spoke to him about his acting up in class and being disruptive, he told his parents about the incident and they had him removed from that class (Newman, 2004). Later, his murderous response to his teachers’ efforts to keep him in line suggests that he saw himself as being above the rules. This is especially noteworthy because Andrew was not a chronic troublemaker who received serious disciplinary action. Rather, he was more of a class clown who had occasional brushes

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with school authority (Newman, 2004). Even these attempts to manage his behavior, however, resulted in premeditated, cold-blooded murder.

Another possible indicator of grandiosity was that one of the murdered children was a girl who had dated Andrew, but broken up with him (Fox et al., 2003). It is possible that this was such a wound to his narcissism that he felt justified in killing her.

Though Mitchell Johnson, Andrew's accomplice, pleaded guilty and apologized in court, Andrew pleaded not guilty and made no apology or public statement (Newman, 2004). Though this could have been for legal reasons, the apparent lack of guilt or remorse suggests that, like other psychopaths, Andrew refused to accept responsibility for his actions. A staff member in the prison where Andrew was incarcerated reported seeing no evidence of remorse (Newman, 2004). During the trial, multiple reporters described Andrew as showing no remorse or concern for the proceedings (Bragg, 1998; Gegax, Adler, & Pedersen, 1998). In contrast to Andrew's nonchalance, Mitchell wept in court (Lines & Compston, 1998).

Based on the available information, Andrew appears to have been a pre-adolescent psychopath.

3.4.2 · Eric Harris, age 18

Eric Harris, along with Dylan Klebold, committed the rampage shooting at Columbine High School. He came from an intact, well-functioning family (Columbine Review Commission, 2001).

Eric was an expert in impression management. He took pleasure in lying to people and getting away with things. He wrote, "I could convince them [school administrators] that I'm going to climb Mount Everest, or that I have a twin brother growing out of my back ... I can make you believe anything" (Cullen, 1999).

Eric's writings reveal in his ability to fool his parents, school personnel, and others. He charmed his way to an early termination of a probation program he was ordered to participate in following his arrest for stealing electronic equipment from a van. At the same time that he was conning the legal professionals, he was writing scathing remarks about the situation in his journal (JCSO, 1999, pp. 26,116, 26,005).

Psychopaths do not recognize laws or morality as constraints on their behavior. Eric wrote repeatedly in his journal about his rejection of traditional values. He stated, "Morals is just another word" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,012). Elsewhere he wrote, "There's no such thing as True Good or True evil" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,010). His refusal to acknowledge morality made it easy for him to violate social norms and laws. Prior to the attack, Eric broke many laws. He stole in the community and he stole at school (Bartels & Crowder, 1999; JCSO, 1999, pp. 10,697, 10,718). He vandalized homes of peers and he vandalized a commercial establishment (JCSO, 1997; JCSO, 1999, p. 19,642). He bought guns illegally and detonated homemade bombs for fun (Pitzel, 2004; JCSO, 1999, p. 10,426). He hacked into the school's computer system and engaged in credit card fraud (JCSO, 1999, pp. 497, 10,381). Eric's disregard for social norms was manifest long before the attack.

Eric was grandiose. He wrote "Ich bin Gott," which is German for "I am God," in his school planner and the yearbooks of his friends (JCSO, 1999, pp. 960, 2,234, 10,713, 26,087). Eric declared, "My belief is that if I say something, it goes. I am the law" (JCSO,

1999, p. 10,415). Despite his desire to be God, he knew that he wasn't: "I feel like God and I wish I was, having everyone being OFFICIALLY lower than me" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,005). This statement indicates that he did not have a delusion of grandeur, but rather the aspiration to be recognized as superior to everyone else.

Eric was callous and sadistic. He fantasized about raping girls he knew (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,016), and also fantasized about mutilating people:

I want to tear a throat out with my own teeth like a pop can. I want to gut someone with my hand, to tear a head off and rip out the heart and lungs from the neck, to stab someone in the gut, shove it up to their heart, and yank the f—ing blade out of their rib cage! I want to grab some weak little freshman and just tear them apart like a wolf, show them who is god. Strangle them, squish their head, bite their temples in the skull, rip off their jaw ... the lovely sounds of bones cracking and flesh ripping, ahhh ... so much to do and so little chances. (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,016)

Eric's behavior during the attack was also notable for his sadism. He taunted people and laughed as he gunned them down (Cullen, 2004).

Eric's combination of narcissism, sadism, impression management, delight in deception, and rejection of morality and law define him as a psychopathic school shooter.

3.5 · BEYOND THE TYPOLOGY

Recognizing the different categories of school shooters is an important step forward in understanding them. Nonetheless, categorizing them as traumatized, psychotic, or psychopathic does not explain their attacks. Many people fit these categories without committing murder. Thus, other factors need to be considered.

Among the traumatized shooters, two factors stand out as significant. First, all three had father-figures who engaged in criminal behavior involving the misuse of firearms. In two of these cases, the fathers engaged in armed stand-offs with police. Evan Ramsey's father went on a rampage at a newspaper office resulting in a standoff with law enforcement. Jeffrey Weise's father killed himself during an armed standoff with police. In the case of Mitchell Johnson, his stepfather had been incarcerated for drug charges as well as a firearms charge (Fox et al., 2003). Thus, each of the traumatized school shooters had family role models for criminal behavior and the illegal use of firearms.

The second factor is that each of the traumatized shooters had peer influence to commit the attack. Evan Ramsey just wanted to kill himself, but his friends talked him into going on a murderous rampage. Mitchell Johnson was recruited by Andrew Golden to join him in the attack. Jeffrey Weise was supported or encouraged by his cousin to shoot up the school.

Illegal use of firearms by father-figures and peer influence were almost exclusively limited to the traumatized shooters. None of the psychopathic or psychotic shooters had father-figures who engaged in the illegal use of firearms. Regarding peer influence, of the five psychotic shooters, only Dylan Klebold was recruited by a peer to commit the attack. The psychopathic shooters were not recruited by their peers; they were the ones who recruited others. Thus, peer influence and the illegal use of firearms by father-

figures not only differentiate the traumatized shooters from other traumatized youths, but they also differentiate the traumatized shooters from the other types of shooters.

Among the psychotic shooters, family structure appears to have been a relevant factor. All five psychotic youths were the youngest siblings in their families. In addition, the older siblings of all of them were higher functioning (see Langman, 2009). None of them had siblings who were at all psychotic, and several of them had siblings who were markedly successful in multiple domains. The psychotic shooters were misfits in their own families, and the differences between them and their siblings were obvious to their parents and teachers. These facts resulted in increased rage and anguish among the psychotic shooters.

In addition to the possible influence of family structure, *DSM-IV-TR* (2000) notes several factors that increase the likelihood of violence among schizophrenics. These include being male, having an early onset of symptoms, excessive substance use, and not taking antipsychotic medications. All of these factors may have contributed to the psychotic shooters' attacks. They were all male. They all had an early onset of psychotic symptoms (the median age of onset of schizophrenia among males is the mid-20s). At least four of the five engaged in substance abuse (DeJong et al., 2003; JCSO, 1999; Lieberman, 2006; Newman, 2004). Finally, none of them had been prescribed antipsychotic medications. Thus, a number of factors help to distinguish the psychotic shooters from other people with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders.

The psychopathic shooters were distinguished by several factors. First, they each came from families with at least two generations of law abiding firearms use. Eric Harris's grandfather had been in the military, and his father was a career officer in the Air Force (Bartels & Crowder, 1999). Andrew Golden's grandfather was a hunter and game warden, and his parents were the leaders of a local pistol association (Newman, 2004). Thus, both boys grew up in homes where firearms were a normal part of life. Beyond this, however, each boy had a fascination with weapons. Andrew reportedly was obsessed with firearms (Fox et al., 2003; Newman, 2004). Eric's identity, in particular, seemed to depend on firearms for a sense of power. When he obtained his first guns, he wrote, "I feel more confident, stronger, more Godlike" (JCSO, 1999, p. 26,017).

Both Eric and Andrew were sadistic. This differentiates them from other psychopaths. Neither Hare's (1999) list of psychopathic traits, nor the diagnostic criteria for antisocial personality disorder, includes sadism. Psychopaths typically lack empathy for others and can hurt or kill without any remorse. This is not sadism, however. Sadism involves seeking out opportunities to have power over others and inflict pain or death for the sake of getting a thrill from doing so (Millon & Davis, 1996).

Finally, the psychopathic shooters successfully recruited followers to join them in their attacks. It is possible that neither Eric nor Andrew would have gone on a rampage alone. Thus, the presence of peer support may have contributed to their decision to commit a school shooting.

4 · DISCUSSION

As seen in Table 1, the three types of shooters can be identified by factors associated with trauma, psychosis, and psychopathy. Three key features of each type were selected to demonstrate the within-type similarities and the between-type differences.

TABLE 1 *Characteristics of three types of school shooters*

	Psychopathic			Psychotic			Traumatized		
	Narcissism	Lack of empathy	Sadism	Hallucinations	Paranoid delusions	Grandiose delusions	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Parental substance abuse
Andrew Golden	✓	✓	✓						
Eric Harris	✓	✓	✓						
Michael Carneal				✓	✓				
Andrew Wurst				✓	✓	✓			
Kip Kinkel				✓	✓				
Dylan Klebold					✓	✓			
Seung Hui Cho					✓	✓			
Evan Ramsey							✓	✓	✓
Mitchell Johnson							✓	✓	✓
Jeffrey Weise							✓		✓

It is noteworthy that only two out of 10 shooters were psychopathic. Though it might seem logical to think that mass murderers are psychopaths, most of the school shooters in this study were not psychopathic. In addition to their psychopathic personalities, the two shooters in this category came from families with long histories of legal firearms use, and both boys were obsessed with weapons. They also both recruited peers to support them in their attacks.

It is also remarkable that half of the shooters in this study had schizophrenia-spectrum disorders. This prevalence of psychosis has not been reported previously. One reason for this may be that people find what they are looking for. In previous studies, psychosis was often not one of the factors under investigation. Thus, it was neither looked for nor found. Another possible explanation for the lack of attention to psychosis may be the limited psychological information about the shooters that is initially available after an attack. Evidence of psychosis may not emerge until months or years later, meaning that earlier attempts to study the shooters are significantly limited. In the case of Dylan Klebold, for example, his journal was not released until over seven years after the attack at Columbine. Thus, research conducted prior to this did not have access to crucial information.

Among the psychotic shooters, the most common psychotic symptom was paranoia. All the psychotic shooters experienced some level of paranoid thinking. Other symptoms, such as grandiose delusions, auditory hallucinations, and disorganized thoughts, occurred in several of the psychotic shooters.

In addition to their psychotic features, the shooters in this category had higher-functioning siblings, which left them feeling like failures within their families. They also had several features that are associated with violence among schizophrenics: they

were male, had early onsets of psychotic symptoms, engaged in substance abuse, and did not take antipsychotic medications.

The traumatized shooters shared two key factors that differentiate them from other traumatized children. First, they had father-figures who engaged in the illegal use of firearms. In fact, two of the three boys had fathers in armed stand-offs with police. The fathers may have served as role models for public rampages with firearms. Second, all three traumatized shooters had peer support for the attacks. In each case, friends of the perpetrators were arrested for their roles in encouraging the shooters.

Looking more broadly at the phenomenon of rampage school shooters, the typology presented in this article highlights the importance of individual psychological factors, rather than social factors such as media violence, in understanding this population. Looking at whether or not the shooters were picked on ignores the profound significance of their respective histories of multiple traumas, psychotic symptoms, or psychopathic traits. This does not mean that none of the shooters were teased, but the teasing needs to be understood within the context of their personalities, histories of trauma, or schizophrenia-spectrum disorders.

The typology also helps to explain the varied results of other researchers who studied school shooters. As noted in the literature review, different studies obtained different results regarding whether or not the perpetrators had histories of illegal behavior, trauma, psychosis, and other factors. Even within particular studies, there were mixed results regarding many of the features being investigated. The lack of consistent findings, both within studies and across studies, can be at least partly explained by the presence of three distinct types of shooters.

Verlinden et al. (2000), for example, could not say that school shooters had histories of abuse, nor could they say that the shooters did not have histories of abuse. They could only note that some did, but most did not. At the time, this finding may have seemed inconclusive. In light of the typology, however, it makes sense — there is a subset of shooters who have histories of abuse; other shooters, however, have no such history. Thus, the typology provides a window through which previous research can be seen from a new perspective.

4.1 • LIMITATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATION

This investigation relies on information available from other sources. The amount, quality, and consistency of information varied across cases. Further research is needed to provide support for the ideas advanced in this article. This research could be on actual school shooters, as well as youths who have planned school shootings but were stopped before they could carry out their plans.

4.2 • CONCLUSION

Previous investigations into school shooters have typically looked for what the perpetrators have in common. Though this approach has yielded important information, it has tended to overlook significant ways in which rampage school shooters differ. In considering the ten cases where there was sufficient information for analysis, the shooters were divided into three categories: traumatized, psychotic, and psychopathic. These

categories are not intended to be exhaustive, and further research may uncover other types. Also, it is possible that these types could overlap. For example, a psychotic or psychopathic youth could also be traumatized. The intended purpose of this paper is to stimulate thinking regarding this population and encourage further research.

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[This reference list has been edited from the previously published text for stylistic clarity and consistency. The content remains the same. — Ed., 2025]

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