

# Two Finnish School Shooters

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## INTRODUCTION

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In the years 2007 to 2008, two rampage school shootings occurred in Finland. This article provides brief summaries of the lives of the two perpetrators. Unfortunately, the available information is limited and does not allow for as detailed an analysis as with some shooters. Nonetheless, the perpetrators shared a number of features with school shooters in the U.S. and Canada that will be highlighted in this discussion. Most of the information presented below is from the Finnish Ministry of Justice reports on each incident, with additional information from news articles written in the wake of the attacks as well as scholarly articles from academic journals.

The two shooters, Pekka-Eric Auvinen and Matti Saari, were similar in a number of ways. Neither had a history of childhood abuse. Neither presented with a psychopathic personality or behavior. In fact, both were unusually shy, anxious, and even timid. The challenge they present is how to make sense of timid young men becoming mass murderers. My conceptualization is that they both had features of avoidant personality disorder. This disorder is characterized by “a pervasive pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation.”<sup>1</sup> Under the stress of adolescence they deteriorated into schizotypal personality disorder. This disorder is summarized as follows: “a pervasive pattern of social and interpersonal deficits marked by acute discomfort with, and reduced capacity for, close relationships as well as by cognitive or perceptual distortions and eccentricities of behavior.”<sup>2</sup> In order to cope with a world that was overwhelming to them, they created new identities for themselves as ultra-masculine killers.

This article continues the line of research on a typology

of school shooters that has been presented in several other works.<sup>3</sup> The typology categorizes school shooters into three types: psychopathic, psychotic, and traumatized. Based on the lack of childhood traumas and psychopathic traits in Auvinen and Saari, and the apparent presence of schizotypal traits, both men are categorized as psychotic school shooters. This conceptualization is similar to that of other psychotic shooters, including Dylan Klebold, Luke Woodham, and Marc Lépine.

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## PEKKA-ERIC AUVINEN

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On 7 November 2007, 18-year-old Pekka-Eric attacked his school in Jokela. He shot and killed six students, a school nurse, and the principal. He also tried to set the school on fire, and then committed suicide.

### *Background*

Auvinen reportedly came from a stable family that included his parents and a younger brother. There were no major conflicts reported in the family, no violence, and no substance abuse. The parents did have concern about the violent content in some of the video games he played, and intervened by confiscating and selling those games with excessive violence. The family had lived in their home for over ten years. Auvinen progressed normally in school, had friends, and had no criminal record. As he moved through adolescence, however, his friends became fewer and his school performance declined. The official report stated that in the upper grades he had no friends,<sup>4</sup> though elsewhere in the same report it is noted that Auvinen talked to his friends about shooting and buying a gun.<sup>5</sup>

There are reports that he had been bullied at school, as well as reports that he had not been bullied. Nonetheless, the official report indicates that at least verbal harassment did occur:

This was probably because he dressed more neatly than others, he expressed his extreme opinions vociferously, and his interests were generally different from those of other youngsters. He was also bullied for his insecurity and involuntary blushing.<sup>6</sup>

What interests and opinions might have resulted in harassment? Auvinen was fascinated by school shootings in the U.S. and discussed Columbine and other rampage attacks at home, school, and online. He admired the Unabomber and believed that violence was an acceptable method of solving problems. Auvinen's comments indicated his admiration for school shooters and the possibility that he would carry out a rampage attack.

Auvinen apparently was influenced by a Finnish ecologist, Pentti Linkola, whose writings address the issue of overpopulation. Linkola is well-known in Finland for his extreme views, and Auvinen made a video tribute to him in which he included the following quotes from Linkola: "A minority can never have any other effective means to influence the course of matters but through the use of violence," and "I wish that death to mankind comes soon."<sup>7</sup>

By the age of 16, Auvinen had significant social difficulties. In April 2006, he began taking medication for panic disorder and social anxiety. By the fall of 2007, he had discontinued the medication. He was not under the influence of the medication (or any other substances) at the time of the attack.

In 2007 Auvinen had his military call-up examination: "His fitness classification was E for mental health reasons, which would have meant deferment for three years."<sup>8</sup> He reportedly did not mention his depression or suicidal thoughts. It is not known why he was deferred.

### *Events Leading Up to the Attack*

According to his diary, Auvinen had been planning his attack since March 2007.<sup>9</sup> Also, "he wrote an entry in his diary in which he said he was going to initiate an operation against humanity with the purpose of killing as many people as possible."<sup>10</sup> His parents reported that in the months preceding the attack, Auvinen's grades declined, he increasingly isolated himself in his room, and he spent much of his time on the computer.<sup>11</sup> His mother noted that Auvinen seemed to become even more fearful of social situations in the summer of 2007, even something routine like applying for a job.<sup>12</sup>

A peer noticed that he was acting strangely and that "he withdrew into his shell."<sup>13</sup>

In August 2007,

other youngsters noticed that his behaviour had become unusual and told a youth worker about their concern. This youth worker received similar reports from several young

people up to the end of October 2007. The perpetrator behaved threateningly toward other youngsters, saying that they would die as a result of a white revolution.<sup>14</sup>

In the summer of 2007, he became involved with an online girlfriend. When she found a new boyfriend in the fall, Auvinen became verbally aggressive and insulting comments were exchanged among Auvinen, the young woman, and her new boyfriend. Interestingly, the night before his attack, Auvinen apologized for his behavior.

Auvinen was very active with online activities, including posting videos. His videos often celebrated school shootings. In addition, some of them included "sodomasochistic sexual fantasies."<sup>15</sup> This material included:

violent pornographic video clips and fantasies of near-rape ... The videos portray innocent-looking nude or semi-nude women helplessly bound, gagged, and struggling to get away. These pictures are coupled with his fantasies of abducting women and forcing them to submit to his will.<sup>16</sup>

Auvinen commented in one of his videos that women "are cheating whores, lying sluts and manipulative bitches. They are best when they are dominated, bound & gagged."<sup>17</sup>

Auvinen did not apply for a firearm permit until October 2007. He was initially denied because the caliber of the weapon he wanted was considered too powerful for target practice (the reason he gave for wanting a gun). His second application was for a smaller caliber weapon, and this was approved on 19 October. He did not purchase the weapon until 2 November, just five days before his rampage. He appears to have only practiced with it once, making a video of himself shooting. He uploaded this video to the Internet. He had talked to peers about shooting and buying a gun, but his family was not aware that he had purchased a firearm.<sup>18</sup>

In the months leading up to the attack, Auvinen posted multiple videos online, including ones about Hitler / Nazis and the Columbine killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. His peers reported that he spoke obsessively about his gun.<sup>19</sup> They also observed that he had been acting strangely and seemed more withdrawn and perhaps depressed.<sup>20</sup>

Though Auvinen committed his rampage at his school, he had considered other sites for his attack. According to one source, Auvinen posted online "that he might commit a spree killing in the Finnish parliament because of the corrupt nature of politicians."<sup>21</sup> It was also reported that he "even considered going on a shooting rampage in a shopping centre but thought that school would be better because shooting in a school would give him more public attention."<sup>22</sup>

These comments show that he had no particular rage directed at the people in his school. Though he had been bullied during his school years, he did not frame his attack as revenge for bullying. The fact that he considered attacking politicians in parliament or random people at a shopping center shows that he had no particular focus for his attack.

## Manifesto and Other Writings

Auvinen left several pieces of writing, including his YouTube profile, a manifesto, his likes and dislikes, and information about his upcoming attack. Much of what he wrote echoes the writings of Eric Harris.

Harris wrote lists of things he loved and things he hated, and Auvinen left a list of his loves and hates. Harris wrote repeatedly of natural selection and eliminating those who are unfit from the planet, and Auvinen did the same. Harris wrote about self-awareness, existentialism, and his superiority over others, and Auvinen did this, too. Harris complained about retarded and stupid people, and we see similar complaints in the writings of Auvinen. Harris wrote about the “final solution” of killing off humanity, and Auvinen wrote about “a final solution” being “the death of entire human race.”<sup>23</sup> Harris liked to think of himself as a godlike being, and Auvinen wrote, “compared to you retarded masses, I am actually godlike.”<sup>24</sup> Eric Harris wrote, “HATE! I’m full of hate and I love it.”<sup>25</sup> Auvinen wrote, “Hate, I’m so full of it and I love it.”<sup>26</sup> Auvinen clearly had read Harris’s journal and was copying it. Elsewhere in his manifesto, Auvinen wrote, “Like some other wise people have said in the past, human race is not worth fighting for.” Harris was the source of this “wisdom.” He had written, “The human race isn’t worth fighting for.” The parallels between the writings of Auvinen and Harris are too numerous to include them all.

## Discussion

First, it is noteworthy that despite the fact that Auvinen made no mention of his depression or suicidal thoughts during his interview for the military, he was given a mental health deferment. Obviously, there were concerns about his psychological stability. Also, his academic decline and increasing social withdrawal is similar to that of Marc Lépine and Kimveer Gill, two psychotic shooters.<sup>27</sup>

In Theodore Millon’s model of personality disorders, schizotypal traits can emerge through the deterioration of an avoidant personality. Auvinen’s social anxiety and frequent blushing suggest that he may have had an avoidant personality disorder, a disorder characterized by severe social anxiety. He became increasingly withdrawn through adolescence and it was during this time that he developed an interest in extreme ideologies. This may have been the withdrawal into the self that schizotypals often experience, along with unusual beliefs or strange ideas.

Auvinen also exhibited an odd combination of traits that resemble those of other schizotypal school shooters (Dylan Klebold, Marc Lépine). The combination involves extreme insecurity/anxiety alternating with abrasive/belligerent behavior. Usually people who are anxious are conflict-avoidant and go out of their way to not say anything to antagonize anyone. Auvinen, despite his social anxiety, was so vocal about his extreme political views and interest in violence that he generated hostility and was harassed. This behavior has been described among schizotypals:

“At times lack of inhibition in displaying certain emotions is especially striking in otherwise markedly inhibited persons.”<sup>28</sup>

He was also teased about his clothing. His peers reported that he “often wore the same clothes to school – brown leather jacket, black trousers and checkered shirt – and usually he carried a briefcase.”<sup>29</sup> As noted by Millon, people with schizotypal personality disorder often have an odd appearance, including unusual clothing: “Many dress in strange and unusual ways, often appearing to prefer a ‘personal uniform’ from day to day ... The tendency to keep to peculiar clothing styles sets them distinctively apart from their peers.”<sup>30</sup>

There were also multiple reports about his behavior becoming unusual, and though this could mean many things, it may have been the eccentric behavior that is seen in people who are schizotypal.

Auvinen’s sadomasochistic sexual fantasies are reminiscent of the sexual preoccupations of Dylan Klebold. Klebold had an interest not only in pornography but in sexual bondage.<sup>31</sup> Hoch and Polatin wrote about people with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders having “a great many sexual preoccupations,” and Wender reported “a chaotic pattern of sexual interaction.”<sup>32</sup>

Auvinen’s ideology and his resulting manifesto can be understood as a schizotypal trait. People with schizotypal personalities have difficulty functioning in reality, withdraw into their own mental worlds, and create alternative realities to compensate for their inadequate identities. In Millon’s words, this is a process of “constructing new worlds of self-made reality.”<sup>33</sup> For example, Dylan Klebold was painfully shy and insecure; his journal reveals that he developed an internal world in which he was a god-like being, and sometimes even referred to himself as a god. He looked down on the masses of humanity and referred to people as “zombies.”

Similarly, Auvinen, who was insecure and was prone to blushing in public, created an internal reality in which he was a god-like being who looked down on the masses of humanity, whom he called “retards,” “robots,” and “vegetables.” He wrote, “I can’t say I belong to same race as the lousy, miserable, arrogant, selfish human race! No! I have evolved one step above! ... Compared to you retarded masses, I am actually godlike.”<sup>34</sup> This is grandiose thinking, if not delusions of grandeur.

Additional grandiosity is seen in his manifesto:

When my enemies will run and hide in fear when mentioning my name ... When the gangsters of the corrupted governments have been shot in the streets ... When the rule of idioracy [*sic*] and the democratic system has been replaced with justice ... When intelligent people are finally free and rule the society instead of the idiocratic rule of majority ... In that great day of deliverance, you will know what I want. Long live the revolution ... revolution against the system, which enslaves not only the majority of weak-minded masses but also the small minority of strong-minded and intelligent individuals! If we want to live in a different world, we must act. We must rise against

the enslaving, corrupted and totalitarian regimes and overthrow the tyrants, gangsters and the rule of idiocracy.<sup>35</sup>

This is not only grandiose, but bears no connection to what he actually did. In reality, he shot some people at his high school. In his mind, he was initiating an action to topple totalitarian regimes. This is like Seung Hui Cho's manifesto in which he wrote:

The vendetta you have witnessed today will reverberate throughout every home and every soul in America and will inspire the Innocent kids that you have fucked to start a war of vendetta. We will raise hell on earth that the world has never witnessed. Millions of deaths and millions of gallons of blood on the streets will not quench the avenging phoenix that you have caused us to unleash. Generation after generation, we martyrs, like Eric and Dylan, will sacrifice our lives to fuck you thousand folds for what you Apostles of Sin have done to us.<sup>36</sup>

Both Cho and Auvinen had idealized, grandiose views of what were horrendous acts. There was no rational connection between their views of themselves and their actions. They were not heroes or martyrs or revolutionaries; they were young men out of touch with reality. The tendency of schizotypals to create unreal identities was described by Millon as a result of their fear of losing their selves. This fear "may overwhelm these patients driving them into a bizarre psychotic state in which they create tangible illusions to which they can relate, self-referential ideas that give them a significance they otherwise lack."<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Auvinen's manifesto is largely a regurgitation of Eric Harris's writings. Auvinen quotes Harris, refers to Harris, and imitates Harris. It's as if Auvinen submerged his socially anxious self and adopted Eric Harris as an alternate identity. This dynamic occurred with Dylan Klebold and Luke Woodham, two other shooters with schizotypal traits. Klebold attached himself to Harris and transformed himself from a shy, floundering adolescent into a mass murderer.<sup>38</sup> Klebold also took on Harris's interest in the Nazis, as well as imitating the followers of Charles Manson.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Woodham attached himself to Grant Boyette and became interested in Satanism, Nazis, and the ideas of Nietzsche. What Klebold and Woodham had in common was that they were both insecure, anxious teenagers who attached themselves to older, dominant peers and ideologies of power in desperate efforts to be strong.

This is a common dynamic among the psychotic shooters, who sought to connect themselves to ideologies of power. This includes the following shooters and their ideologies: Andrew Wurst (Anti-Christ/Satan, Hitler), Steven Kazmierczak (Nietzsche, Nazis, Satanism), Marc Lépine (Nazis), and Kimveer Gill (Nazis). In addition, psychotic shooters often looked to previous school shooters as role models. Those who did so include Andrew Wurst, Kip Kinkel, Alvaro Castillo, Kimveer Gill, Seung Hui Cho, and Stephen Kazmierczak. In a study of thirty-five school shooters, I concluded, "Following in the foot-

steps of previous killers was most common among psychotic shooters. The psychopathic and traumatized shooters generally acted without reference to either ideologies or role models."<sup>40</sup>

Auvinen's adoption of Harris's ideology, the theme of natural selection, of having evolved higher than the rest of humanity, and so on, shows that he was modeling himself on Harris as a role model. This by itself does not mean that he was a psychotic shooter, but it fits the pattern seen in other psychotic shooters.

Finally, Millon described what happens when people with schizotypal personality disorder are stressed beyond their ability to endure:

Many schizotypals have stored up intense repressed anxieties and hostilities throughout their lives. Once released, these feelings burst out in a rampaging flood. The backlog of suspicions, fears, and animosities has been ignited and now explodes in a frenzied cathartic discharge.<sup>41</sup>

This explains how mass murder can be committed by a young man who was anxious and shy.

## MATTI SAARI

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Matti Saari carried out his attack on 23 September 2008, at a branch of the Seinajoki University of Applied Sciences in Kauhajoki. He was a 22-year-old student studying culinary arts. He killed ten people in his class and wounded one, set fires in the school, and committed suicide.

### *Background*

Saari's childhood is notable for his health problems. As a toddler, his growth and development were slow and he had frequent illnesses. He also had several hospitalizations before starting school, though the reasons for these are not known. (These early health problems are reminiscent of the early development of Seung Hui Cho.) In terms of temperament, "He has been described as lively and happy as a baby but shy, withdrawn, and quiet as a child and later in his life."<sup>42</sup>

Saari's parents separated when he was a year old. He had an older brother who suffered from a congenital illness and died when Saari was 17, which reportedly was a devastating loss. The family relocated twelve times due to the father's work, resulting in six school changes for Saari in his nine years of primary and secondary schooling. Saari moved out from his family's home shortly before he turned 18.

During his school years Saari reportedly was bullied, including physical assaults, threats to break his moped, spitting in his face, and drawing caricatures of him on the blackboard.<sup>43</sup> His mental health records begin at age 13 and indicate problems with anxiety and panic attacks, as well as depression and suicidal thoughts. In 2007 he had what may have been a major depressive episode in which "he lay motionless and apathetic in his bed, refusing to eat or drink anything."<sup>44</sup>

Saari spent a brief period in the military, starting on 10 July 2006. He reported having a difficult time fitting in. His fellow soldiers reportedly described him as “weird and silent” and as a result he was teased and bullied.<sup>45</sup> Saari also behaved inappropriately and on one occasion shoved another soldier while holding a gun in his hand. His scores on the physical tests were poor and Saari continued to be depressed, suicidal, and anxious. His service was interrupted on 31 August 2006, less than two months after it began. It was also reported in a news article (but not the official report) that Saari “terrified fellow recruits by opening fire against orders in a woodland exercise”<sup>46</sup> and attributed his discharge to this incident. Because this contradicts the official report the accuracy of this information is questionable.

Saari had an erratic educational history in his late adolescence and early adulthood. He dropped out of upper secondary school, a vocational school, and then another school.<sup>47</sup> He eventually attended the culinary arts program at Kauhajoki Polytechnic. He reportedly was not bullied at this school, had friends there, and told people he liked it at Kauhajoki. He completed the first year satisfactorily and began his second year in September 2008.

### *Problematic Behavior*

In Saari’s later school years he got involved with “petty theft and intoxicants.”<sup>48</sup> In the spring of 2008 he traveled to Hungary for a practical training course. He did well there but exhibited problems with alcohol and disturbed people by the way he played with a knife. He also made reference to suicide and expressed admiration for Pekka-Eric Auvinen and the shooting in Jokela the previous autumn.

His drinking became more problematic, and “His intoxication was occasionally accompanied by aggressive behavior, fisticuffs and language his friends considered frightening.”<sup>49</sup> While drunk at a party in a restaurant, he also talked about school shootings with women and when he was rejected he commented, “You’ll be sorry.”<sup>50</sup> When an employee of the restaurant where this occurred intervened, Saari reportedly seemed “strange,” did not make eye contact, and did not respond to the employee. In a different situation, when he met with a nurse specialist about his depression, he reportedly did not make eye contact with her, either.

At some point he apparently was arrested for drunk driving and for “an incident at a grill kiosk, where the perpetrator [Saari] had been threatened.”<sup>51</sup> In the summer of 2008 there was an unexplained incident on a ship where Saari was “imprisoned” because he had become violent toward a friend.

His friends noticed a change in his behavior, but some dated it to two years before the attack and others to two months before the attack. Though some people reportedly saw Saari as a typical young man, others thought he was “abnormal.”<sup>52</sup> He reportedly became obsessed with guns and with school shootings in the United States.

Shortly before the attack, a brief relationship with a girl-

friend ended. Also, several acquaintances of his were killed in a car accident. The impact of the deaths on Saari is not known, but he reportedly commented that the break-up with his girlfriend would result in depression.

In Finland, people must be interviewed to get permission to buy firearms and then must present the firearms to the police before they are allowed to use them. Saari’s behavior when he presented his gun is noteworthy:

The policeman was bothered ... by the perpetrator’s [Saari’s] odd behaviour. For example, he had been giggling and snuffling while presenting the gun ... The policeman who had performed the inspection did take the matter up in the police department later that day, saying that he hoped this was not the next school killer.<sup>53</sup>

Saari presented his gun on 2 September 2008. On 19 September, it came to someone’s attention that Saari had videos online about shooting. On 22 September, the police followed up with Saari who stated that there were lots of videos online about shooting. The officers did not confiscate his gun or conduct any further evaluation. The next day, Saari committed his attack.

Saari did not leave a manifesto but left behind a note saying that the attack was due to his hatred of humanity and was also revenge for bullying. As retaliation for bullying, however, the attack did not make sense:

There are no records or references indicating that the perpetrator had been discriminated against or bullied at Kauhajoki Polytechnic. His studies went well there. The perpetrator had told his mother and friends that he liked it in Kauhajoki. He also had a few friends at the polytechnic, with whom he spent some of his leisure time.<sup>54</sup>

The official report concluded, “There is no indication of the act being an act of revenge.”<sup>55</sup>

### *Imitating Auvinen*

Saari, like Auvinen, admired Harris and Klebold. In addition, however, he also admired Auvinen. He traveled to Jokela and took photographs of the school where Auvinen committed his rampage. He also bought guns from the same company that Auvinen bought his guns from. And, like Auvinen, he not only shot people but set fires in the school. On the day of his attack, Auvinen wore a shirt that said, “Humanity is overrated.” Several days before his attack, Saari got drunk and said to people, “Humanity is overrated.”

In addition:

The perpetrator’s [Saari’s] hair and dressing style had undergone a change during the summer preceding the incident. He now combed his hair back and wore a black leather jacket, which attracted attention. His new style was reminiscent of that of the Jokela school killer [Auvinen].<sup>56</sup>

An article that appeared shortly after the attack reported that

Auvinen and Saari had multiple contacts online. This is contradicted by the official report that states, “The police investigated whether the perpetrator had any connections with the Jokela school killer, but none were found.”<sup>57</sup> (The article in question is the same article that provided different information on Saari’s military experience than the official report.) A former girlfriend of Saari’s reported that he had been in touch with Auvinen but the police were unable to verify this.<sup>58</sup>

Also, the photographs and videos that Saari posted online resemble those of Auvinen. Though Saari left no manifesto like Auvinen’s, he did leave two suicide notes that included the comments, “I hate the human race, I hate mankind, I hate the whole world and I want to kill as many people as possible.”<sup>59</sup> Given his fascination with Auvinen, it seems likely that he had read Auvinen’s manifesto and thus may have derived his ideology of hatred of humanity from Auvinen.

## Discussion

Saari left no significant writings to speak of – no manifesto, no journal. Thus, we have no inside view of his thoughts. As with the analysis of Auvinen, the following comments are tentative. To start with, Saari, like Auvinen, appears to have had an avoidant personality that under the pressure of adolescence and adulthood changed into a schizotypal personality. Both young men were unusually shy, anxious, and socially insecure. Saari was bullied, and this appears to have been more severe than what Auvinen endured. Though bullying is common in Finland,<sup>60</sup> perhaps Saari was bullied worse than most students because he was socially anxious which made him an easy target, or because he was odd and engaged in eccentric behavior.

There are multiple reports of people who were put off by Saari: people who thought he was abnormal, two reports of his not making eye contact (*DSM-IV-TR* notes that lack of eye contact occurs with schizotypal personality disorder),<sup>61</sup> his bizarre strategy of trying to pick up women at a party by talking about school shootings, disturbing people by his behavior with a knife, soldiers who thought he was weird, and the policeman who thought Saari’s behavior was odd. The hallmark of schizotypal personality disorder is that the person strikes others as odd. We have repeated hints that this occurred. As stated by Millon, “As a consequence of their strange behaviors and appearances, schizotypals are readily perceived by others as aberrant.”<sup>62</sup>

Also, like Auvinen, Klebold, and Lépine, Saari was a shy, anxious, timid person who was also belligerent and even physically aggressive. He got into fights. He shoved a soldier while holding a gun. He attacked a friend and needed to be imprisoned on a ship. As discussed above, this is an unusual combination of traits, but one that has been seen in other psychotic shooters.

Though Saari did socialize with peers, a friend of his commented, “He wasn’t a very sociable person.”<sup>63</sup> Also, he was characterized as “reserved about his personal matters.”<sup>64</sup>

This seems to resemble Dylan Klebold, who was socially active with friends but not socially comfortable. Also, Dylan

was very secretive about his personal thoughts and feelings.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Marc Lépine was very private; his peers commented that he would talk about a variety of things but not about himself.<sup>66</sup> Millon noted this trait: “Schizotypals are able to talk about only a few relatively tangible matters.”<sup>67</sup>

Friends of Saari’s noted that his behavior changed in the months or years preceding his attack. His own father became disturbed by Saari’s behavior and feared he might be a danger to himself and others; his father, however, was not able to put his finger on what was concerning him. Something about Saari had changed. This change might have been the onset of schizotypal traits. For example, the incident in which Saari lay in bed and did not eat could have been a depression, but it could also have been a psychotic episode.

Saari had an erratic history as a young adult. He dropped out of school three times and left the military after less than two months. This resembles Marc Lépine’s checkered career of numerous false starts in jobs and academic programs. Millon identified this as a common schizotypal trait: “Rather than finding and holding a secure niche for themselves in society ... they upset their progress repeatedly.”<sup>68</sup> He also commented that “academic and work histories show marked deficits and irregularities, given their intellectual capacities.”<sup>69</sup>

The extent to which Saari imitated Auvinen is noteworthy. As discussed above, using previous shooters as role models has been common among psychotic shooters. Saari made a pilgrimage to Auvinen’s school, bought his guns from the same dealer as Auvinen, and reportedly even changed his hair and clothes to look like Auvinen. This is reminiscent of Alvaro Castillo, a psychotic shooter in North Carolina who made a pilgrimage to Colorado to see Columbine High School and while there bought a black trench coat like the ones Harris and Klebold wore.

This imitative behavior suggests that like other psychotic shooters, Saari felt inadequate to meeting the requirements of life. He was anxious, depressed, and unable to function socially. He struck people as odd and behaved in strange ways. He retreated into a private world, using alcohol to self-medicate. To pull himself out of his inadequacy he used Auvinen – as well as Harris and Klebold, whom he admired – as figures he could mentally attach himself to and imitate.

## Conclusion

Auvinen and Saari were socially inhibited young men with no close friends and no intimate relationships who ended up becoming psychotic school shooters. How did they become who they were? Millon identified two types of schizotypal personality disorder: the insipid schizotypal, which has its roots in schizoid personalities, and the timorous, which has its roots in the avoidant personality, which seems to be the most relevant for Auvinen and Saari. Regarding the origin of the timorous schizotypal, Millon wrote:

Many timorous schizotypals were exposed to an early his-

tory of deprecation, rejection, and humiliation, resulting in feelings of low self-esteem and a marked distrust of interpersonal relations. Others may have been subjected to belittlement, censure, and ridicule, not only from parents but also from sibs and peers.<sup>70</sup>

How much this describes the histories of Auvinen and Saari is not known. We do know that both were subjected to some level of bullying, with this apparently being worse for Saari. We do not know the quality of the parenting they received, but Saari's parents separated when he was one year old so there was an early disruption in his family structure.

Saari also experienced the death of his brother, as well as the deaths of several acquaintances shortly before he went on a rampage, as well as the break-up of a short relationship with a girlfriend. Auvinen also had a break-up with a girlfriend (an online relationship) not long before he committed his attack. Both Auvinen and Saari experienced failure in the military, which could have been blows to their self-esteem and male identities. Their sense of masculinity may also have been impaired by physical considerations. Auvinen was short and Saari had been so small as a child that his development was carefully monitored. Other school shooters appear to have struggled with their identities due to stature and other physical issues.<sup>71</sup>

Auvinen and Saari both had personalities characterized by shyness and timidity. How much of this was genetic and how much was a result of their life circumstances cannot be known. As they passed through adolescence, however, their functioning deteriorated and they appear to have developed schizotypal traits. Their ability to cope was compromised by the increasing stress of life as they approached adulthood, as well as a series of blows – rejections, deaths, and failures. They sought to transform themselves from fearful, inadequate weaklings into beings of power and in order to achieve this they created identities for themselves as fearless, ultra-masculine killers. Then, in the words of Millon quoted above, the shooters' "feelings burst out in a rampaging flood."

## NOTES

- 1 American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (Fourth Edition, Text Revision). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, p. 718.
- 2 American Psychiatric Association, p. 697.
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