

Introduction

This article examines school shootings committed by four grown men: Marc Lépine, Kimveer Gill, Steven Kazmierczak, and Jiverly Wong. My other works (*Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters*, and “Expanding the Sample: Five School Shooters”) examined perpetrators of school attacks who were in middle school, high school, and college. The killers discussed in this article were 25-years-old or older.

In addition to expanding the sample in terms of age, two of the shooters explored in this article expand the sample in terms of the definition of rampage school shootings. The shooters that I focused on previously were students or former students at the schools they attacked. This was not the case in the two Canadian shooters included here: Marc Lépine and Kimveer Gill.

The article will first identify similarities between Lépine and Gill, and then explore each of them in greater depth. Then Kazmierczak and Wong will each be discussed. The four adult school shooters will then be compared to each other, as well as to the younger school shooters presented in *Why Kids Kill* and “Expanding the Sample.”

Marc Lépine and Kimveer Gill

Marc Lépine committed what became known as “the Montreal Massacre” on December 6, 1989, at the École Polytechnique, where he killed fourteen women. Kimveer Gill shot twenty people, killing one, at Dawson College on September 13, 2006. Though they appear to have been very different types of people from very different types of families, they had many things in common. Some of these may be coincidental or insignificant; others may have been important elements in their development as killers. These similarities will be noted, and then Lépine and

Gill will be discussed separately in greater depth.

Lépine and Gill were both 25 years old when they committed their attacks. Both attacks occurred in Montreal. Both men belonged to cultural minorities. Lépine’s father was Algerian, and Lépine’s original name (before he changed it at age 14) was Gamil Gharbi. Gill’s parents were from India. I do not know what impact his cultural identity had on Gill, but Lépine reportedly was painfully self-conscious about his name because it stood out as being different.¹

Both Lépine and Gill committed their attacks at colleges that they never attended. Neither was in college anywhere at the time of their attacks. Both had taken college courses, but had dropped out of their programs. In addition, Lépine had twice been rejected by École Polytechnique where he went on a rampage (he was rejected in 1987 and 1989²).

Lépine and Gill each had a family history of military service. Lépine’s uncle reportedly was a paratrooper who taught him to use firearms.³ In addition, his father may have been a soldier. Mrs. Lépine stated that Mr. Gharbi was a victim of torture in a war in Algeria,⁴ but it is not clear if he were a soldier or civilian. Regarding Gill, “Radio Canada reported that Gill wanted to join the Canadian Forces to follow in the military footsteps of his family in India.”⁵

Despite their family histories in the armed forces, the two men failed in their military aspirations. Lépine applied to the Armed Forces but was rejected.⁶ Gill enrolled with the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School in St. Jean sur Richelieu, but was discharged after a month. Though the military has never disclosed the reason for Gill’s discharge, his peers reported that he simply didn’t make the grade.⁷

Lépine and Gill were both drawn to the Nazis. Lépine admired Hitler, learned some German words, and at least once gave a Nazi salute in public.⁸ Gill wrote admiringly of Aryan men as the best soldiers in the world. He also learned some

German words, and wrote “Heil Heil Heil” in his online journal.⁹ Finally, both men were fascinated with war, violence, and weapons.

Marc Lépine

Marc Lépine is an enigmatic figure. Based on the available information, it is tempting to see him as a traumatized shooter. Though this may be accurate, it is difficult to get a sense of how traumatic his upbringing was. Also, there are aspects of his behavior that complicate the picture. We have virtually no writing of his to give us a window into his mind – just the final note he left about his impending rampage.¹⁰

Family Relationships

Lépine’s father (Liess Gharbi), as described by Lépine’s mother, appears to have had psychopathic features. Mrs. Lépine described him as a charismatic man with “extraordinary self-confidence,”¹¹ but highly controlling, possessive, bad-tempered, violent, and deceitful. At the time that she was giving birth to her son, she found out that another woman had two children by Mr. Gharbi. He openly admitted this to his wife with no remorse or apology. He lived a double life with no show of concern for morality or the feelings of the people involved.

The family life was difficult for Marc in several ways. First, Mr. Gharbi had a bad temper and would frequently swat his wife, son, and daughter on the back of their heads when he felt annoyed by them.¹² He also had violent outbursts. One article reported that Marc experienced “hellish years of abuse at the hands of a violently chauvinist father.”¹³ In her book, however, Mrs. Lépine wrote that Mr. Gharbi once struck Marc in the face so hard that the marks lasted a week. After this, she filed for divorce and the family separated into two households.¹⁴ Thus, in her account, it sounds as if the first significant incident of child abuse led to a separation and eventually divorce. This is not to minimize what happened, but the picture from Mrs. Lépine does not seem to equal “hellish years of abuse.”

Apart from whatever violence was directed at him, however, Marc also witnessed domestic violence. From her account, it seems as if Mrs. Lépine was the most frequent target of her husband’s abuse. Thus, Marc was both a victim and witness of violence in the home. According to Mrs. Lépine, Marc cut his father out of his life at the age of six, which was the last time he ever saw him. Mrs. Lépine stated that after the father and son’s last meeting, she never heard Marc say his father’s name or speak of him again.¹⁵ Also, when Marc was old enough (at age 14), he changed his name from Gamil Gharbi to Marc Lépine.¹⁶ A friend of Marc’s commented that Marc “despised” the way his father treated his mother.¹⁷

The family life was problematic in another way, too. The family moved frequently, sometimes relocating to other countries, including Puerto Rico and Costa Rica. Mrs. Lépine said that in Marc’s twenty-five years of life he had moved at least fifteen times.¹⁸ These frequent moves may have added to his

sense of instability, especially when he lived in countries where he didn’t know the language. The many disruptions to his social life made it difficult for him to maintain long-term friendships.

Yet another difficulty in Marc’s childhood was his mother’s poverty. After separating from her husband, Mrs. Lépine struggled to keep the family afloat financially. One way she did this was to have her children live with another family during the week so that she could work as a nurse. The first family the children stayed provided a nurturing experience that lasted for two years. A second family was adequate, but her children were not as happy as they had been; they were with this family for a few months. The third family apparently worked out well.¹⁹

On the positive side, her children received good care and were usually in families with other children their ages with whom they got along well. On the negative side, they were not with their mother. Did this affect Marc’s feelings for his mother? A detective told Mrs. Lépine that Marc had been angry about being left with other families.²⁰ A former friend of Marc’s told Mrs. Lépine that Marc loved her.²¹ There is no reason that both statements could not be true.

Overall, based on his behavior at the end of his life, it appears that Marc felt warmly toward his mother. Her birthday is December 20. Marc’s attack occurred on December 6. Four days before the attack, Marc gave his mother a birthday present. When she asked why he didn’t wait until her birthday, he gave an evasive answer.²² In addition, Marc left her a note that she found after the attack. The note began, “I am sorry, Mom.”²³ Thus, even as he was planning a massacre, he bought and delivered a birthday present and left an apology for his mother.

If his feelings for his mother were positive, the same cannot be said of his feelings for his sister, Nadia. She was 3½ years younger, but was more assertive and dominant than Marc. As they grew up, she thought he was weird. She teased him and taunted him and put him down in front of his friends. When she saw him kiss a girl she burst out laughing and he felt humiliated. When he didn’t have a girlfriend, she made fun of him and called him “gay.”²⁴ When Marc was twelve or thirteen years old he was so enraged by Nadia that he made a mock grave and tombstone for her in the backyard, with her name and photograph on the gravestone.²⁵ Later, Nadia became a drug addict in early adolescence and spent four years in a residential treatment program. She never maintained any stability, abused drugs, prostituted herself, and eventually committed suicide several years after her brother’s rampage.

Social Skills, Academics, and Work

Mrs. Lépine noted that no one saw anything abnormal about Marc when he was young. A mother and daughter who knew Marc when he was a boy, described him as a good student and “a happy, mischievous kid.”²⁶ As an adolescent and young adult, however, Marc was extremely shy, anxious, and socially awkward. A friend commented: “It seemed like he was afraid to move without my permission. He was tongue-tied around my parents too and had trouble even saying hello to them, even though they were always glad to see him.”²⁷

Though he could be friendly at times, he could also alienate people. A woman named Dominique stated: "I was kind to him because he was so hyperactive and nervous, nobody would talk to him at lunch or break time ... Everyone else tried to avoid him because he was a bit strange because of his shyness."²⁸ Dominique also said that Marc told her he had asked many girls to go out with him but they all refused. He said, "They won't go out with me. I'm not good looking."²⁹ Another woman, however, said that Marc told her he once had a girlfriend.³⁰

Sylvie, a classmate of Marc's in a chemistry class, described him as remarkably nervous. She also said that he was bossy and controlling:

He was very severe with me. I was never correct. He was being a fascist. The lab was never done well enough. He was always right ... And he was giving me these orders all the time. Wash those things. Don't do the calculation like that. Go and get something. Do this. Don't do that.³¹

A couple of male friends noted that Marc was socially immature – at age twenty he seemed much younger. His behavior struck people as strange – perhaps he laughed too loud, or argued too much.³²

A number of people observed that Marc rarely engaged in personal conversation. He much preferred to talk about other things. One friend said, "He never breathed a word about his family. All he ever talked about was computers."³³

In addition to computers, Marc had other intellectual interests. He was fascinated by military history and weapons. He had a vast collection of war books, magazines, movies (and horror movies).³⁴ A friend recalled, "His idea of a good time was going to the library and reading science books."³⁵ Even more unusual, Mrs. Lépine said that as a young adult Marc "would often fall asleep reading the dictionary."³⁶ Apart from his intellectual pursuits, Marc enjoyed shooting pigeons.³⁷

Despite his intelligence, Marc pursued a circuitous route through college, taking courses in one field, switching to another field, failing a couple of classes, and signing up for courses and dropping out of them. Once he even signed up for two courses and then dropped them before they even started. He also had a series of menial jobs that never lasted long. One goal of his was to attend the École Polytechnique and become an engineer. As noted above, he applied twice and was rejected both times. He also tried to join the military and was rejected there, too.³⁸

Anger, Women, and a Role Model

Lépine reportedly had a bad temper. This was indicated by his lab partner in chemistry who was quoted above. In addition, a friend of his described him as highly volatile and easily enraged, and recalled a time Marc punched a hole in a wall.³⁹

As he became older, Lépine's anger focused on women. He blamed them for many of his failures. He also believed that women should stay home and take care of their families. He was particularly contemptuous of female police officers. This became an obsession. A lab instructor of his was struck by Lépine's state-

ment that there were only six female officers in Montreal. When asked how he knew this, Lépine replied, "I have only found the names of six of them in newspaper stories."⁴⁰ In addition, in his suicide note he included the names and telephone numbers of nineteen prominent women.

Lépine's suicide note railed against feminists, blaming them for ruining his life.⁴¹ His note also expressed contempt for females in the military. During his rampage, he shouted, "You're women, you're going to be engineers. You're all a bunch of feminists ... And I hate feminists!"⁴²

Lépine was unusual, though not unique, in justifying his rampage with a political ideology. Eric Harris was fascinated by the idea of natural selection and the elimination of inferior beings; on the day of the attack at Columbine, Harris wore a shirt that read "Natural Selection." Similarly, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, a Finnish shooter, wrote a manifesto (influenced by Eric Harris) that claimed his upcoming attack was not a school shooting but a political act. In Lépine's case, his misogyny was his ideology.

One other element in Lépine's attack is worth noting. In his suicide note, he cited Denis Lortie as an inspiration. In 1984, Lortie had stormed the Canadian Parliament in a murderous rampage attack against the government. The reference to Lortie was perhaps Lépine's way of framing murder as a political act.

Analysis of Marc Lépine

What was wrong with Marc Lépine? This is a difficult question to answer. As noted earlier, he may belong in the category of traumatized school shooters. Like other traumatized shooters, he grew up with domestic violence and endured some level of emotional and physical abuse. Also, like other traumatized shooters, he grew up to a large extent without a father. He last saw his father at age six. Other shooters in this category lost their fathers to varying degrees through death, divorce, significant geographical separation, or imprisonment. Like other traumatized shooters, Lépine had frequent relocations and a variety of caregivers.

Despite these factors, I feel that they do not account for all that we know about Lépine. Perhaps it is because compared to Evan Ramsey and Jeffrey Weise, his family dysfunction does not seem nearly so severe. Perhaps it is because of other behavior or traits of Lépine.

Lépine was remarkably shy and socially awkward. Yet, he was also rude, bad-tempered, and controlling. This blend of traits is striking. Generally, I would expect someone who is shy and anxious to be unassertive in an effort to avoid rejection. Shy people seem unlikely to be bossy and controlling. Obnoxious behavior is exactly what a shy person would avoid in order to be liked.

It could be argued, of course, that this mix of behaviors was the result of his chaotic family life, leaving him anxious but full of rage. But there are other possibilities to consider. Lépine's social anxiety could have been due to an avoidant personality disorder. This is essentially a severe form of shyness. This, however, would not account for his bossy, controlling behavior.

Or, perhaps Lépine had Asperger's disorder. This is char-

acterized by significant social and emotional deficits, as well as obsessive interests and/or rigid patterns of behavior. Is there any evidence that Lépine had features of Asperger's disorder? His extreme social awkwardness could be explained this way. Also, we have brief glimpses of behaviors that might suggest Asperger's: reading the dictionary at bedtime, preferring reading science books in the library to hanging out with friends, and wanting to talk about computers and nothing else. The fascination with language, science, and computers are the kind of obsessions that are often seen in people with Asperger's disorder.

In addition, people with Asperger's can be bossy and controlling because it is essential to them that things be done in a certain way. They typically have rigid perspectives and patterns of behavior and without intending to be offensive, can be perceived as rude and demanding. Finally, the manifestation of his obsession with female police officers is noteworthy. He wasn't just angry, but he tracked references to them in the newspaper and kept count of how many there were. This obsessive attention to detail might suggest Asperger's.

These little glimpses, however, are not enough for a solid assessment. In addition, Asperger's does not appear at puberty; it is present early in a child's development. Yet as noted above, Marc was described as a happy and mischievous child. This does not sound like a child with Asperger's disorder. Furthermore, Mrs. Lépine stated that there was nothing abnormal about Lépine as a child. Thus, this diagnosis does not seem to fit.

Perhaps Lépine had schizotypal personality disorder or was developing schizophrenia. Not only did some of his friends find him weird or odd, but his combination of extreme shyness with a bad temper is reminiscent of Dylan Klebold. Dylan was also painfully shy and anxious, but in adolescence became bad-tempered and aggressive. Before Dylan's journal was made public, I had left him out of my typology because there was too little information to make sense of him. Once his journal was released, his bizarre thinking and disorganized thoughts were apparent.

In Lépine's case, we have no such window into his mind. If we did, we might see evidence of psychosis. This would explain his deterioration in functioning. He was a bright young man with career aspirations, but he pursued a meandering path through college with many false starts and failures, had jobs such as washing dishes, and ended up not working, not attending school, and with virtually no social life. This inability to function suggests a possible onset of schizophrenia.

Though we have no clearly documented psychotic symptoms, a friend of his recalled the following incident:

In the early 1980s, Marc was taking a computer programming course in the downtown building where I worked. One day I came upon him in a crowded elevator. I scarcely recognized him; he seemed completely out of it and was mumbling what sounded like German words. And then, right there in the midst of all those office workers, he raised his right arm in a Nazi salute. I could have died! Everyone stared at him as though he was nuts.⁴³

Such an act does not necessarily mean that Marc was psychotic,

but the impression that he was "completely out of it" and the bizarreness of his behavior suggest that he might have been having a psychotic episode.

In addition, his view of feminists as people who have ruined his life has a paranoid element. He had reasons to be angry at specific women in his life, but none of them were feminists. He felt rage toward his sister, but didn't attack her. He may have been angry at his mother, but appears to have cared for her. He may have been angry at women who rejected him, but did not seek revenge against them. Instead, he focused his rage on feminists and blamed them for ruining his life. What feminist ever harmed him? Was this a delusion or a rationalization for the anger he felt toward women? If a delusion, then Lépine was psychotic.

To meet formal diagnostic criteria for schizotypal personality disorder, it is necessary to have five out of nine traits. Lépine seems to have had at least four: excessive social anxiety, lack of close friends or confidants, odd/eccentric behavior, and paranoid ideation. If we had more information about his thoughts and experiences, he might meet one or more additional criteria. As it is, we know that peers thought he was odd, and that people thought he argued too much and laughed too loudly. A case could be made that he had odd thought processes or beliefs, or inappropriate affect. Thus, schizotypal personality disorder may be the best diagnosis for Lépine.

Finally, it is important to note that Lépine's hostility was not toward women in general, but feminists. His rage and contempt were directed at three groups of women. He railed against female police officers, female soldiers, and female engineers. Why them? Two reasons seem apparent. First, these women were functioning in roles traditionally defined as male. Second, two of these were roles that he had pursued and failed to achieve. He was rejected by the military and he was rejected by École Polytechnique. Thus, he didn't commit mass murder at a mall, restaurant, or a randomly chosen street corner. He committed murder at the school that rejected him and where women were succeeding in the career he had aspired to. His rampage was not an act of vengeance but an attempt to destroy threats to his identity as a male.

Kimveer Gill

Our resources for understanding Kimveer Gill are different than those available for Lépine. We have almost no writing by Lépine, but his mother wrote a book that provides a narrative of his life. In the case of Gill, we have only bits of information about his life available from newspaper articles, but we have many pages of his online postings. How much the nature of informational resources shapes our understanding remains an unanswered question.

Family and Childhood

Gill's parents were from India, where they married shortly before emigrating to Canada. Kimveer was born in Canada on July 9, 1981. Approximately two years later, twin brothers were

born. His parents have been described as loving and attentive. No hint of mistreatment or dysfunction has been uncovered. By all accounts, Gill was a normal child who was “quiet, nice, sensitive and generous.”⁴⁴

When Gill was nine years old he received a certificate for outstanding effort at school, and the following year was given a Citizenship Award.⁴⁵ He enjoyed playing several sports, including floor hockey, basketball, and tennis. In sixth grade, his goal was to become a lawyer and “make people go to jail.”⁴⁶ For two consecutive years in high school he received certificates of merit for good conduct.

He reportedly was a well-behaved, well-liked boy who was not ostracized or bullied. As a classmate stated, “He wasn’t a guy that got picked on, not at all – who picks on a tall, big guy who could kick your ass if you picked on him?”⁴⁷ Yet despite his size, he was repeatedly described as gentle. A woman who knew him commented that “Kimveer’s was a gentle soul ... Gentle like few I’ve come to know.”⁴⁸

Adulthood

Gill attended Vanier College with several of his high school friends. After one semester, however, he dropped out and joined the Army in January, 1999. One of his friends said that Gill talked about becoming a mercenary and wanting to live out the war movies that he frequently watched. Other friends said that Gill was highly patriotic and wanted to fight for Canada.⁴⁹

After just one month in the military, however, Gill was “honorably released.” This reportedly could mean he didn’t meet the standards, left voluntarily, or was released due to medical reasons. His mother said he left because he missed home. Two of Gill’s fellow recruits, however, said Gill was discharged because he didn’t meet military standards of behavior.⁵⁰

Gill then had a series of jobs, but was laid off in 2001. This reportedly was a serious blow to him. Other stressors at the time included his mother’s struggle with breast cancer and his father’s heart problems. Gill had another string of odd jobs, as well as six-months of coursework in industrial drafting at Rosemont Technology Centre. His friends noted that Gill was not moving ahead in life as they were, commenting that it seemed like he was mentally still in high school.⁵¹ (As noted previously, Marc Lépine’s friends made essentially the same comment about him.)

Through his early twenties, Gill did not progress academically, occupationally, or socially. He never had a girlfriend. He began to drink. He increasingly isolated himself. He also began spending more time with an old friend named Rajiv Rajan. Mrs. Gill observed that her son was influenced by Rajan. She said, “Rajiv said that it was very easy to manipulate Kimveer because he’s too honest and too trusting.”⁵² This raises the question of what Rajan was manipulating Gill to do. Mrs. Gill noticed that even Kimveer’s mannerisms and voice began to mirror that of his friend.

The influence of Rajan becomes an important consideration because in January, 2006, he and Gill took photographs of themselves posing with one of Gill’s firearms – the same one he used at Dawson College. In addition, after Gill’s rampage on

September 13, 2006, Rajan sent an email to someone indicating that another rampage could occur if his demand for \$10 billion was not met. When police searched Rajan’s home, they found a three-page letter of Rajan’s in which he again demanded \$10 billion. It was also reported that Rajan had vowed to follow in Gill’s footsteps by carrying out another school shooting.⁵³ Whether the two men discussed committing a rampage attack is unknown. Despite Rajan’s threats, police found no weapons in his home.⁵⁴

As 2006 progressed, Gill became increasingly odd. A neighbor said, “It was only lately ... that he wore dark clothes ... Dark clothes and a funny haircut.”⁵⁵ Another neighbor commented, “He never had friends with him. He was always alone.”⁵⁶ Gill’s mother noticed he was becoming more and more withdrawn.⁵⁷

VampireFreaks.com

Beginning in December, 2005, Gill posted messages and information about himself on the website VampireFreaks.com. Whereas the information in the sections above was provided by outside observers, this section focuses on what Gill revealed about himself, whether intentionally or inadvertently. Two versions of his postings are available – printed pages that were scanned into a pdf document, and an electronic version of the text of his postings. The scanned pages show what his web pages looked like and contain a number of pages that are not included in the electronic version. The electronic version, however, has the advantage that it is searchable. Both versions are available at www.schoolshooters.info (when Gill’s writings are quoted in this article, his spelling, punctuation, etc. have generally been corrected).

One notable feature of Gill’s postings is the extent to which he appears to be influenced by Eric Harris. First, in a list of his “likes” he includes “Reb and V (Modern Day Saints).”⁵⁸ Reb was Eric Harris’s nickname and V was short for Vodka, which was Dylan Klebold’s nickname. Identifying Harris and Klebold not only as people he likes, but as “modern day saints” indicates Gill’s attitude toward them. Nor was this attitude a secret. At least two of Gill’s friends knew that he was highly interested in the attack at Columbine.⁵⁹

Many of Gill’s comments seem to imitate Eric Harris’s writings. Harris complained about people who walk slowly, people who drive slowly, and so on (see *Why Kids Kill* for a discussion of this). Gill complained about waiting in slow lines. Harris liked to write “Ich bin Gott,” which is German for “I am God.” Gill also wrote “Ich bin Gott” and “I am God.”⁶⁰ Harris admired the Nazis and drew swastikas. Gill wrote admiringly of Aryans and also wrote “Heil Heil Heil” in his postings, as well as “Germany rulz” (i.e., “rules”).⁶¹ Harris wrote about the government deceiving people; Gill wrote about the government deceiving people. Eric wrote disparagingly of the masses of humanity as “robots.” Gill wrote disparagingly of the masses of humanity as “animals” or “the humans.” Harris was hostile toward the police; Gill was hostile toward the police.⁶² Harris wrote, “I say KILL MANKIND” and Gill wrote “Destroy all mankind.”⁶³ Perhaps some of these similarities are coincidences, but some certainly

seem to be imitation.

In addition, Harris recorded sadistic fantasies of mutilation, and Gill did, too. He wrote about the following scene: “Disemboweled bodies litter the streets. Some have been decapitated, others hung off bridges and over-passes. Yet, others still lie burning. Flames slowly eating away at their putrid flesh. Glorious.”⁶⁴ Like Harris, Gill took pleasure in imagining human mutilation.

Contradictory Selves

A striking aspect of Gill’s writings is the way his tone and attitude shift dramatically. For example, at 2:15 am on August 28, 2006, Gill wrote: “Things weren’t like this before. People had respect for each other, they had manners, and a sense of decency. Stop degrading yourselves, I’m trying to help you. RESPECT WOMEN YOU FUCKING ANIMALS.”

Then, at 2:42 am, less than a half hour after demanding that people respect women, Gill went on a verbal rampage – against women: “What’s with all the bitches? It’s almost as though there was some sort of bitch convention somewhere, and 85% of the women went and all agreed to be bitches forever.” Then he attacked men: “What’s with all the assholes? ... They must have made a pact to be assholes and fucktards for the rest of their lives.”

Gill went from writing about manners, respect, and decency to scathing assaults. In other places, he wrote about Italians (after they won the World Cup in soccer): “All the fucking waps are jumping up and down like the little monkeys they are ... Fucking animals.” He alternated between protesting the way people mistreat each other, pleading for respect and decency, and then lashing out with nasty, degrading comments.

On July 13 he wrote: “People kill each other. Rape women. Molest children. Deceive and betray. Destroy lives. Bullying and torturing each other at school. What kind of world is this?” Two months later, he shot twenty people. It seems as if his earlier self were trying to assert itself, only to be shouted down by the outpouring of his rage.

Grandiosity and Paranoia

Some of Gill’s posts indicate that he saw himself as having insights or awareness that no one else had (this, too, is similar to Eric Harris). For example, on September 1, 2006, he wrote:

The governments of the world keep lying to the people of the world, and the people believe it. Come on folks, WAKE UP!! They’re using fear tactics to keep you pacified, and all those who ask questions suddenly disappear. Am I the only one in the world who can see these things?

This combines grandiosity and paranoia. First, in his mind, he was the one who saw what no one else could see. Second, the idea that in Canada and the USA (which is where most of the people he was addressing probably lived) “all those who ask questions suddenly disappear” has a paranoid flavor.

Other evidence of grandiosity was cited above with Gill’s writing “Ich bin Gott” and “I am God.” In addition to these, Gill made other grandiose comments. As noted, he often wrote of

people as “the humans” or as “animals,” as if he were not a human, too. On August 24, 2006, he wrote, “I’ll never understand humans. The way they live their lives, their feelings, the things they want to do in life.” On August 28, he said, “I am ashamed to be part of the human race.” (Interestingly, Eric Harris had written, “I am ashamed to be part of the same species as some of these people.”⁶⁵)

On July 9, 2006, Gill wrote, “FUCK THE WORLD. You’re all animals. I can see through you. When I look in your eyes I can see your thoughts.” Here we see Gill’s condescending arrogance. Also, the line about seeing people’s thoughts through their eyes could indicate delusional thinking.

These quotes seem to indicate that Gill was aware he was human, but felt himself to be apart from, and better than, the rest of humanity. In other quotes, however, he seemed to be even more grandiose. For example, on July 28, 2006, he wrote:

Stop praying to your imaginary gods little monkeys
Because I’m the only god you need to pray to
I AM GOD. Heil Heil Heil

And on September 10, just three days before his rampage, Gill wrote, “God, you humans are so inferior.” Taking these statements at face value, it appears that Gill had delusions of grandeur. It is difficult to know if we can take them at face value, however. Unlike Harris and Klebold who kept journals where they wrote at length about their thoughts and feelings, Gill’s postings are often brief and enigmatic. The consistency of the theme of grandiosity, however, suggests that Gill was losing touch with reality.

Perhaps his strangest post was written on September 12 (the day before his attack). The title of his post is “Sorry niggahs” and is addressed to African Americans: “I tried to get the American government to give you your reparations cheques for slavery ... But no one listens. No one cares.” What did he mean by this? Did he really believe he had tried to get the American government to provide reparations to African Americans? Had he perhaps sent an email to someone in the government about this? Or is the whole thing a fabrication or delusion? We have no way of knowing, but the idea that he tried to influence the American government sounds grandiose, or at least out of touch with reality.

Gill also recorded several paranoid thoughts about the police watching him:

The police are watching me. They actually think I don’t know this. They are monitoring my movements.

I know you’re watching me motherfuckers. I laugh at thee. There is nothing you can do to stop me.

I wonder why my household has been under surveillance by law enforcement for 6 years now? ... Everything everyone says or does against me is shown to me in my dreams. I see everything.⁶⁶

This last quote also contains an element of grandiosity, as if he had special abilities to know and perceive what people do.

Why then? Why there? Why?

Gill's online writings say nothing about his impending actions. It is perhaps noteworthy, however, that on September 10, three days before his attack, he wrote of the video game *Postal*, "I want them to make a game so realistic that it looks and feels like it's actually happening ... You gotta bring *Postal* into the mainstream. I want more people to see what I see." Gill then added, "*Postal* dude was sad before he became angry and psychotic ... He was normal, but the world made him the way he became." It is hard not to read this and see an identification between Gill and "*Postal* dude."

It is not known when Gill first conceived of the idea of committing a rampage attack. In January 2006, however, Gill and his friend Rajan took photographs of each other holding a gun. Shortly after this (February 19, 2006) Gill wrote, "I know you're watching me motherfuckers. I laugh at thee. There is nothing you can do to stop me." Stop him from doing what? Perhaps he was already thinking about his attack at this point. Gill posted another intriguing quote around this time (January 26, 2006): "I am locked in an invisible cage within my head. There is no chance of escape." Again, we don't know what he meant by this, but I can't help wondering if this was his recognition that his psychological functioning was deteriorating. If so, then perhaps several events coincided: the onset (or exacerbation) of Gill's mental health problems, possible peer influence toward violence, and the decision to commit murder.

Another intriguing clue is a comment Gill sent to a true-crime website in the spring of 2006: "Cool page. Like what you do here. But I find you only look at the story one way. Not once have I read a comment you've made about even one of these school shootings being acceptable, or needed. Did you use to be a police officer or something?"⁶⁷ The fact that just a few months before his own school shooting, Gill was writing about such attacks being "acceptable" or even "needed" shows something about his state of mind at the time.

Why Dawson College as the site of his rampage? Unlike Lépine and the École Polytechnique, Gill had never applied to or been rejected from Dawson College.⁶⁸ Why attack people at a school he had no connection to? Gill may have had the same feelings as Lépine toward students in college – they were living the life he wanted to live. There are plenty of public areas that he could have chosen if just wanted to shoot into a crowd. Even if he wanted to kill at a school, he could have chosen a high school, middle school, or elementary school. But he didn't. He chose a college. The kind of school he could have – perhaps felt he should have – been attending. The kind of school he started, but left. It was an attack against people who were doing what he was not – moving ahead with their lives.

Envy is a powerful force. Eric Harris wrote bitterly about kids who thought they were cool and kids who were rich. Seung Hui Cho wrote scathing comments about those he perceived as hedonistic brats. Michael Carneal wrote a story about the sadistic killing and mutilation of preps. In each case the shooters were highly sensitive to issues of status and peers who made them feel inferior. And Kimveer Gill? Here's what he had to say:

Why does society applaud jocks? I don't understand. They are the worse kind of people on earth. And the preps are no better, they think they are better than others but they're not.⁶⁹

Gill, in the lonely isolation of his room, viewed jocks and preps as society's favorites. But he, like the other envious shooters, found a way to elevate himself: "I love guns. I really do. The great equalizer."⁷⁰

Analysis of Gill

Gill admired Harris and Klebold, and apparently modeled himself after Harris. Though I categorized Harris as a psychopath, Gill did not engage in psychopathic behavior or appear to have psychopathic personality traits. He left no history of criminal or sadistic behavior throughout his life. There are not even reports of aggression, explosive anger, manipulation, or narcissism. He was a well-behaved young man who struck people as remarkably gentle.

In fact, the reports of his gentleness are reminiscent of what people said about Dylan Klebold. Klebold was described not only as gentle, but as unusually non-violent. Both Klebold and Gill changed from gentleness to violence. Another possible parallel between the two is that Klebold was influenced by a psychopathic peer (Eric Harris), and Gill may have been influenced by a more dominant peer, too (Rajiv Rajan).

Gill and Klebold differed in the onset of their problems. Klebold struggled with mental health problems throughout his adolescence. Gill sailed through middle school and high school with no evidence of any difficulties. As he entered adulthood, however, his functioning deteriorated and he apparently sought to establish an identity as a powerful person. This would explain his emulation of Eric Harris and admiration of Aryan warriors.

I referred above to Gill's mental health problems. What sort of problem did he have? I suggest that he had adult-onset schizophrenia. The average age of onset for schizophrenia among males is in the mid-twenties, and this fits with what we know about Gill. There were reportedly no signs during his childhood or adolescence of any psychological or social abnormalities. After high school, he tried college, then the military, and then had a series of jobs.

By the time that he was approximately 24 years old, however, he essentially withdrew from life. He didn't work. He didn't attend school. He didn't date. His friends drifted away. He became increasingly isolated and reclusive. He lived with his parents and spent most of his time in his room, speaking less and less to his family. This level of deterioration is consistent with someone struggling with schizophrenia. In addition, his writings suggest paranoid delusions and delusions of grandeur. Delusions are one of the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia.

Are there alternative explanations? Social withdrawal could be the result of depression. If he were just depressed, however, he would not be paranoid or have delusions of grandeur. Besides, his online writing is more notable for anger and contempt than depression. Dylan Klebold's journal clearly documented his anguish, depression, self-loathing, and suicidal thoughts. The

same is true of Jeffrey Weise's online posts. Gill's writings do not reveal significant signs of depression.

Also, Gill had begun drinking and engaged in occasional drug use. Drug abuse could result in psychotic episodes, but in Gill's case this seems unlikely. In his online profile, in response to the item "Number of drugs I have taken" Gill answered "Not a lot."⁷¹ It seems more likely that his drinking was a response to the onset of schizophrenia, rather than being the cause of his deterioration.

Steven Kazmierczak

Kazmierczak was 27 years old when he committed his attack at Northern Illinois University on February 14, 2008. He killed 5, wounded 21, and then committed suicide. We have two significant sources regarding Kazmierczak: an article in *Esquire* by David Vann entitled "Portrait of the Shooter as a Young Man," and the "Report of the February 14 Shootings at Northern Illinois University" (the school's official 322-page report which is available on www.schoolshooters.info). Because these two documents provide detailed narratives of Kazmierczak's life and are easily accessible, a briefer summary will be provided than with Lépine and Gill.

Childhood and Adolescence

Kazmierczak was born on August 26, 1980. He had an older sister, Susan, with whom he rarely got along. His parents were married and employed, but there are hints that things were not as good as they might have been. According to Vann, Kazmierczak and his mother used to watch horror movies together, even when Steve was quite young. Vann wrote of Mrs. Kazmierczak: "She's protective, doesn't want Steve to go outside. Won't let him play much with other children. She's not mentally right, according to Steve's godfather."⁷² Vann also reported that Mrs. Kazmierczak had anxiety problems, Mr. Kazmierczak's side of the family had a history of depression, and a grandfather was alcoholic.

Kazmierczak had an older sister, Susan, who reportedly was "more compliant, better behaved, and more successful academically than her brother."⁷³ Kazmierczak did not get along with his sister, and when he was in eighth grade he became so angry toward her that he chased her from the house with a knife. Following the shooting at Northern Illinois University (NIU), Susan expressed surprise that Kazmierczak had not tried to kill her.

Kazmierczak had friends in adolescence, and also engaged in sexual activity with girls from high school. He had a couple of minor encounters with the police involving criminal trespass and a "Drano bomb" that he and a friend put on someone's porch. According to Vann, when Kazmierczak was a teen he had a business card from the KKK and drew swastikas with spray paint, suggesting an early attraction to extreme political ideologies.

Mental Health Problems

When Kazmierczak was sixteen, he began having significant problems with depression. He "attempted to commit suicide or made suicidal gestures requiring him to be hospitalized for a total of nine (9) times before his eighteenth birthday,"⁷⁴ with at least one attempt after he turned eighteen. As a result of his depression and suicidal behavior, in addition to his hospitalizations, he was placed in multiple residential treatment centers.

In addition to depression, Kazmierczak reported a variety of psychotic symptoms:

Steven acknowledged that he was paranoid and claimed to have "special powers." He claimed to hear voices that continually commented about what he was thinking and how he behaved. It was reported that Steven suffered auditory hallucinations and on at least one occasion had a visual hallucination.⁷⁵

According to Vann, Kazmierczak reported that he could "see" a former girlfriend of his and that he could read minds. He told his psychiatrist that he always had this ability but that the power had become stronger. He also had the compulsion to "check doors and touch objects repeatedly."⁷⁶

Employment and the Military

Kazmierczak had a series of low-level jobs from 1999 through 2001. Several positions were terminated due to his behavioral problems and/or poor attendance. On September 20, 2001, Kazmierczak became an active member of the United States Army. To get into the Army, however, he had provided false information on the application. He did not report his extensive history of mental health treatment. Once his history had been discovered, along with the fact that he provided false information on his application, Kazmierczak was released from service on February 13, 2002.

College and Graduate School

A remarkable aspect of Steven Kazmierczak was his ability to go from being acutely suicidal and psychotic, moving from one treatment facility to another, to becoming an academic success at Northern Illinois University. He not only impressed the faculty for his intellectual ability, but for his personal qualities, too. One professor described him as follows:

He was exceptional as a student, one of those who was definitely a standout. He was every professor's and advisor's dream come true, a very respectful student who was polite and so dedicated and conscientious. Nobody had anything bad to say about him.⁷⁷

Though Kazmierczak was described in glowing terms by his professors, his peers saw him differently. His preoccupation with serial killers and other murderers apparently alienated people. He talked obsessively about Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Hitler,

and the rampage at Columbine. He was given nicknames such as “Strange Steve” and “Psycho.”

Kazmierczak graduated from NIU in May, 2006, and started graduate school in sociology there the following fall. Due to changes in the sociology department, however, he transferred to the University of Illinois. Things seemed to be falling apart for him at this time. He didn’t like having to transfer to a new school. His mother died in September, 2006. He had relationship difficulties with his girlfriend.

Kazmierczak’s functioning deteriorated during 2007. During the early weeks of 2008, Kazmierczak became less social, isolating himself more and more. Then, on February 14, 2008, he returned to NIU, to the building where he had his first class at the college, and committed a rampage attack.

Analysis of Kazmierczak

Kazmierczak fits the category of psychotic school shooters. He had a documented history of auditory hallucinations, at least one episode of a visual hallucination, as well as paranoia. He also resembles other psychotic school shooters in being the youngest in the family and having a higher functioning older sibling. As with other psychotic shooters, he was interested in and apparently influenced by a variety of notorious killers, including Hitler, Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Harris and Klebold, and Seung Hui Cho.

Unlike other shooters in this category, Kazmierczak’s psychotic symptoms were known and treated. Kazmierczak also differed from other psychotic shooters, and school shooters in general, by having a variety of experiences with girls and women. He engaged in both casual, promiscuous sexual encounters as well as long-term relationships. He also experimented with homosexuality and at one point told his sister he thought he might be gay.

Kazmierczak degraded his mother with sexual insults, calling her “whore” and “slut.” This is reminiscent of Andrew Wurst’s calling his mother a “whore” and telling his friends that she was a prostitute.

Kazmierczak complained that at NIU there were “a lot of well-to-do and uppity people.”⁷⁸ He reportedly had a preoccupation with, and intolerance of, people he considered over-privileged. Seung Hui Cho also complained about and criticized those he viewed as over-privileged. Eric Harris had a similar preoccupation. Kazmierczak was also said to be intolerant of those who were less capable or intelligent than he was. This also resembles Eric Harris, who wrote scathing passages about people he viewed as beneath him. And like Eric Harris and other shooters, Kazmierczak was fascinated by the writings of Nietzsche.

Also, Eric Harris wrote a paper for school about the prevention of school shootings. Similarly, in graduate school, Kazmierczak wrote a paper titled “No Crazies with Guns!: A Brief Summary of the Aftermath of Virginia Tech and the Ensuing Debate Over Mental Health and Gun Control Legislation.”

Kazmierczak left no messages about his attack. We don’t know what reasons he thought he had, or why he chose the

place he did. Because he was no longer a student at NIU, having transferred to University of Illinois during his graduate work, he had to travel three hours to get back to NIU. Thus, it was not simply a matter of convenience. He not only traveled to NIU, but went to the lecture hall where he had his first class and many of his sociology classes. This was the place where he had turned his life around, where he had recovered from his history of mental health problems and established himself as the star student in the sociology department. Since then, however, his life had gone downhill. He was in a new school, he was no longer the star, and it probably seemed like everything was falling apart. Maybe he envied those who were on the same path he had been on, so he went back to his beginnings at NIU to kill those who were following in his footsteps and were likely to succeed where he had failed.

Jiverly Wong

On April 3, 2009, 41-year-old Jiverly Wong killed 13 people, wounded 4, and killed himself in a rampage attack at the immigration center of the American Civic Association in Binghamton, New York. At first glance, this may not seem like a school shooting. Nonetheless, Wong had taken English classes at the center and returned to the room where his classes had met. Thus, it was a case of a former student returning to his school and committing mass murder.

Despite the fact that Wong killed as many people as Harris and Klebold at Columbine, there has been comparatively little attention paid to him. Thus, there is no major source of information available. The facts presented here are drawn from news articles that appeared in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

Brief Summary of Wong’s Life

Wong came from Vietnam with his parents and siblings in 1990; he was 22 at the time.⁷⁹ He had a harder time adjusting to this country than other members of his family. His siblings learned English and established themselves, but Wong struggled with the language and had a series of low-level jobs. He lived in the Los Angeles area and in Binghamton, and had at least five encounters with the police over the years. These involved passing a bad check, driving an uninspected vehicle, and other minor violations.

While living in California, Wong got married but kept this secret from most people in his life, including his family. He and his wife separated in 2005 and divorced in 2006. There were varying reports regarding whether or not Wong had any children from this marriage. One article declared there were no children.⁸⁰ A different article quoted a former colleague who said Wong told him he had a daughter.⁸¹ A third article reported that a man who had done some work at the Wong residence commented that Wong often talked about his wife and kids having left him.⁸²

Wong returned to the Binghamton area in 2007 and moved in with his parents. He got a job in a Shop-Vac factory, but still

struggled with English. He signed up for an English class at the American Civic Association in January, 2009. He stopped attending the class in early March.

Wong was an unusually reclusive and silent man. According to his father, he had no friends and barely spoke to anyone in the family. He spent much of his time in his room, with minimal interaction.

Outside of the family, however, he spoke to people about his love of firearms. His primary activity appears to have been going to shooting ranges. He also made comments about hating America, shooting politicians, and killing the president. His obsessive talk about guns and shooting people led coworkers to joke that Wong “would come in mad one day and shoot people.”⁸³ Even though shooting was his major pastime, his family was not even aware that he had guns or that he ever went shooting.

Wong’s withdrawal became even more severe two weeks before his attack. “Wong stopped eating dinner, stopped watching television and rarely emerged from behind his bedroom door.”⁸⁴

On March 18, 2009, Wong wrote a letter addressed to a local television news show that contains complaints of mistreatment and harassment by police and indicates his desire to commit murder and suicide. The letter, however, was not mailed until April 3 – the day of his rampage.⁸⁵

Analysis of Wong

Wong appears to have been schizophrenic and thus to belong to the category of psychotic school shooters. The family had its only glimpse of his psychosis several months after arriving in the United States. Wong told his father that people were trying to kill him. He pointed in front of him and said, “They’re in front of me and trying to capture me.”⁸⁶ His father took Wong to a hospital for evaluation, but the language barrier meant that the professionals probably did not understand the situation. As a result, they concluded that nothing was wrong and Wong was sent home. Wong’s father said this incident was the only time he was concerned about his son’s sanity.

Other evidence of Wong’s psychosis appears in his suicide letter. The letter is notable for Wong’s paranoia regarding police. He accused the police of tampering with things in his home, keeping him under surveillance, spreading rumors about him, making him lose his job, trying to cause him to have a collision while driving, breaking into his room thirteen times, stealing money from him, and more.

Apart from his paranoid delusions and visual hallucination of people standing in front of him who were trying to capture him, Wong exhibited other signs of schizophrenia. These include his social withdrawal and lack of speaking. In this respect, he resembles Seung Hui Cho. Both shooters were remarkably lacking in social relationships, and were notable for their lack of verbal interaction.

Wong also had other behavior that was unusual, but difficult to interpret. He reportedly never wore short sleeve shirts, no matter what the season or temperature. Also, “he always emerged from the bathroom after a shower fully clothed in long

sleeves and pants.”⁸⁷ This behavior could have been a manifestation of his paranoia and an attempt to avoid feeling vulnerable. Michael Carneal, another psychotic school shooter with paranoid delusions, was particularly uncomfortable in the bathroom and would drape himself with multiple towels to avoid having his body be seen.

As to why Wong chose the American Civic Association for the site of his attack, we can only speculate. Given his paranoia and hostility toward police, it would seem to have made more sense for him to go to a police station and open fire. Perhaps he anticipated killing police officers during his attack. This is suggested by the fact that he was wearing body armor. He killed himself, however, rather than waiting for the police to arrive and engaging them in a shootout.

As was discussed with Lépine and Gill, perhaps Wong’s attack was essentially symbolic. He, who had lived in this country nearly twenty years, had been in class with recent immigrants. They were learning the language and preparing to move on with their lives. After nearly twenty years, he was back where he started and going nowhere. The other immigrants represented the success he would never achieve. He felt like a failure and lashed out against those he assumed would succeed.

Comparison of the Four Adult Shooters

Several traits appear in common among most or all of the adult shooters. They all had a fascination or obsession with firearms. Three of the four (Lépine, Gill, Kazmierczak) were drawn to violent films and videogames. These same three also shared an attraction to Hitler and the Nazis. Lépine, Gill, and Kazmierczak also all had military aspirations that were thwarted. All four shooters, no matter how isolated or withdrawn they had been, became even more isolative shortly before their attacks.

The fact that Lépine, Gill, and Wong were members of ethnic minorities is worth noting, but its possible significance is not clear. Wong clearly struggled with the transition to this country as a young adult. The stress of this transition, combined with his schizophrenia, may have played a significant role in his violence. It is possible, however, that he would have been violent even if he had stayed in Vietnam.

Lépine was self-conscious about his Algerian name as a child because it set him apart. This may have had an impact on his identity, but there is no clear connection between this and his rampage attack.

There is no indication that Gill’s cultural identity played a role in his rampage. It is interesting, however, that he and Lépine were drawn to the Nazis with their idea of Aryan/Nordic supremacy. This is similar to Jeffrey Weise, a Native American who was attracted to the Nazis. This attraction among school shooters to the Nazis is seen in both white and non-white shooters. The irony is that the Nazis would have discriminated against these shooters for not fitting the Nazi’s Aryan ideal.

If nothing else, the cultural diversity among the adult shooters provides further evidence that school shootings are not

always committed by whites. Similar diversity exists among the younger shooters, too. Evan Ramsey was at least half Native American, and Jeffrey Weise and Seth Trickey were Native American. Asian American shooters include Wayne Lo and Seung Hui Cho. Latina Williams was an African American shooter.

Finally, at least three of the four adult shooters appear to have been psychotic. Kazmierczak and Wong clearly had psychotic symptoms. Gill's lack of functioning in any domain of his life, along with his grandiose and paranoid comments online, suggest schizophrenia. And though Lépine had some features of a traumatized shooter, his extreme social anxiety and his odd, inappropriate behavior, suggest the possibility of schizotypal personality disorder. If this were the case, then Lépine would also fit in the psychotic category.

Because this sample is so small, generalizations must be made with caution. It is noteworthy, however, that perhaps all four adult school shooters were psychotic. This suggests that if psychopathic and traumatized youth do not commit school shootings in their teens, they are not likely to do so later in life. Lépine, however, may belong in two categories – traumatized and psychotic. If so, this is unusual. Based on my research, school shooters typically fall into just one category.

The adult shooters resemble the younger psychotic shooters in that they all had higher functioning siblings. The younger psychotic shooters, however, were the youngest children in their families. Among the adult shooters, only Kazmierczak was the youngest in his family.

Two younger psychotic shooters, Woodham and Klebold, committed their attacks under the influence of older, more dominant peers. Gill was the only adult shooter who may have been influenced by a peer.

Wong differs from the other adult shooters in multiple ways. First, he was 41 years old and the others were in their 20s. Second, the others attacked colleges, whereas he committed his rampage at a civic association. In addition, he did not share several features that the others did, such as a fascination with violent media, an attraction to Hitler or other notorious figures, and a failed career in the military (unless this happened in Vietnam).

The adult shooters, like the younger psychotic shooters, had social difficulties to varying degrees. Wong's lack of verbal interaction was comparable to Seung Hui Cho's, though Wong talked to people outside of his family more than Cho did. Kazmierczak stands out as more socially active and successful than other psychotic school shooters. There is also reason to believe that the adult shooters resembled the younger psychotic shooters in committing their attacks against people who represented the success that had eluded them.

Notes

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