

WHY KIDS KILL: INSIDE THE MINDS OF SCHOOL SHOOTERS BY PETER LANGMAN PHD



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Review

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In the horrific aftermath of school shootings, distraught communities struggle to make sense of these seemingly senseless acts. Despite massive media coverage, we know little about what drives young perpetrators or how they rationalize their acts. In this breakthrough analysis, Dr. Peter Langman presents the psychological causes of school shootings and offers unprecedented insight into why certain teens exhibit the potential to kill. He shows how to identify early signs of possible violence and offers preventative measures that parents and educators can take to protect their communities.

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- Outstanding Academic Choice Title

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

The threat you know - and sometimes you don't

By Harold the Heron

As other reviews have indicated, I work in public safety as front-line response personnel. I encounter a variety of emergent - and several not-so-emergent conditions - as a matter of routine and understanding them can lead to prevention, improving others' health and decreasing my own workload.

Not so much here. A mass shooting or other active violence incident is a personal fear of mine; yet there is precious little that I can do to genuinely prevent them. Understanding statistics helps (but the data is rough; think p values $< 0.5...$), but does little to mitigate the problem. Planning helps, but as Von Moltke the Elder said, "no plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force."

A PhD candidate for Homeland Security recommended this text as a point-of-reference for understanding not just the mass violence perpetrator, but more specifically, the school shooter. Lang's work moves beyond the cliched "socially isolated victim retaliates" model and instead identifies crucial clinical features that, predicated with the specific circumstances for each shooter, led to the outbreak of a mass violence event at a school.

Langman's work arrives at a critical conclusion - each of these shooters experienced signs and symptoms of mental illness. Some of them could have been treated - and in fact, multiple shooters were - but the absence of closely monitored care and appropriate support structures in the overall healthcare picture meant that too little was communicated too late. Further compounding these events is a phenomena known as "leakage" - specific, targeted, actionable threats known to other students in advance that were not relayed to the authorities. Hundreds of lives have been lost that could have been saved.

Mass violence - be it shooting, stabbing, vehicular homicide, explosives - has a broad array of causal factors ranging from socioeconomic circumstances to geopolitics to the quality and availability of healthcare. Attempting to blame any one cause fails to assign responsibility ultimately to the individuals committing the act and detracts from understanding why they deemed mass violence as the appropriate outlet.

Langman's work presents a strong analysis of the psychological states of several well-known shooters and contextualizes not only the events, but the shooters' lives leading up to them. Based on local reviews from co-workers, Langman's insight into the minds of troubled children is a welcome view into an otherwise-inaccessible combination of psychology and clinical development.

This is not a bible. This is not a solution, or profile, or magic totem to prevent school shootings. It is, however, a warning - and one that may very well save lives.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

An overview of 10 case Studies

By Daniel Hurley

The author provides a review of the 10 most sensational case studies of school massacres at the home of the publication. The same point comes across that these perpetrators all had serious psychological problems, some seemed very obvious, with four defined as psychopaths. Unique that these mass murders typically did

not happen in urban environments where you would think there would be a greater likelihood due to availability of hand guns and the association with a greater potential violent environment but most were in suburb or rural environments. I would have preferred more discussion of a larger number of violent acts to get an even greater perception why these ill individuals act to cause such gross harm. The distressing theme seems to be that these individuals go unnoticed or at least unreported even if their behavior would seem to trigger attention. Ironically, one of the Columbine killers who was a psychopath was also an accomplished liar that even his probation officer thought he was a reformed or decent kid. The writings of a number of the individuals is very chilling and provides a picture of the individuals and how they feel about their peers. Certainly underlines the need for schools and universities to have great assessment teams and in VA. Tech's case, they redeveloped their own threat assessment program that they published called 'Implementing Behavior Threat Assessments on Campus'.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

A limited overview of a complex topic

By Mary K Fanning

Dr. Langman's book is a very readable look at the psychology of school shootings. It neatly held my attention while providing a greater depth of understanding to a difficult topic. The greatest limitation of the text stems from the author's field of study. There is no thoughtful consideration paid to the sociological conditions that produce school shootings- the interactions in classrooms, with peers, and in the home. Of course, that is largely expected. A psychologist will be primarily concerned with psychology, which tends toward individualistic explanations. Overall, this book is a useful addition to the the available resources on school shootings, but cannot stand alone as the definitive text.

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