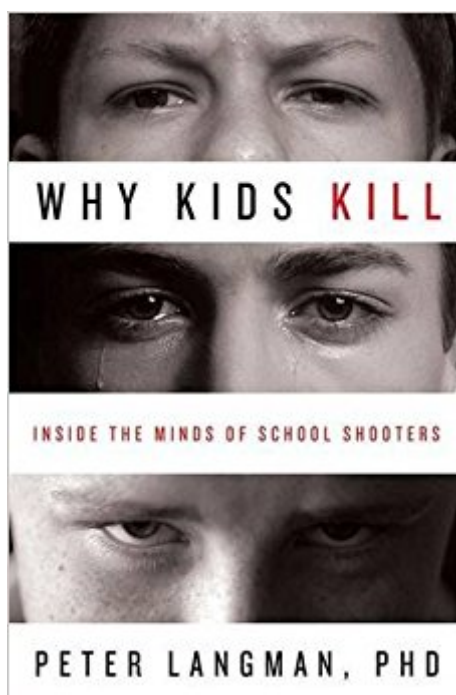


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# Why Kids Kill: Inside The Minds Of School Shooters



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A very strong resource for school counselors and parents. The author meets his task of truly getting into the minds of school shooters. • “Langman offers a paradigm of three specific categories of youth offenders--psychopathic, psychotic, or traumatized. . . . Langman fully discusses long-term exposure to violence, genetic predisposition to violence, recurrent alienation from mainstream society, depression, narcissism, and lack of empathy, as well as improperly challenged and constrained rage in the context of these three categories . . . He also looks at cases of youth who are not as notorious and whose intent to kill others was thwarted, and ends with lessons that can be learned from these and other cases. In addition, Langman presents research that informs current practice with disconnected, enraged youth. Langman believes that school shootings can be prevented, and his analysis offers reflections on how prevention can occur.

A vital, phenomenal, extremely valuable work. Summing up: Essential. all levels / libraries.

—D.E. Kelly, Adelphi University, CHOICE (Sept. 2009)

“Peter Langman’s book *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters* is a highly readable, engaging text that analyzes 10 school shooters, outlines a typology that classifies school shooters into three distinct categories, uses the author’s personal experience in assessing potential school shooters, and outlines practical lessons from foiled and actual attacks

—The author’s extensive review of law enforcement records, clinical insight from his own professional work, and ability to clearly organize all of the information have resulted in a well-written book that is long overdue.

—Brandon Robbins, *Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books*

“The result of his decade-long inquiry

—plumbs the interior lives of 10 notorious school shooters—including Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold and Virginia Tech gunman Seung-Hui Cho—to draw conclusions about what set them off.

—Michael Rubinkam, *The New York Times*

“A thorough analysis of recent school shootings and a helpful prescription for prevention geared to readers outside the psychiatric profession.

—Library Journal

“Mr. Langman, who is the clinical director of KidsPeace, an Orefield, Pa.-based charity that provides mental-health services for children and teenagers in 11 states, draws 10 lessons for parents and educators from his studies of school shootings across the United States.

—Debra Viadero, *Education Week*

“Dr. Langman’s professional expertise and exhaustive research combine to produce a remarkably comprehensive psychological analysis of school shooters that will revolutionize our understanding of this phenomenon. This book provides an in-depth psychological analysis of school shooters that easily can be understood by non-professionals. The outstanding balance between psychological insight and plain language makes this book invaluable to anyone who works with children.

—Mary Ann Swiatek, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist and member of the Association for Psychological Science

“Dr. Langman

—clearly identifies the enormity of the feelings of isolation and meaninglessness that plagued these children. Shows what we can do to make schools safe and homes friendly and child focused. Perhaps his greatest contribution is to point out that hyper reactive child exist in a social context that if it is not empathic and helpful can perhaps trigger the calamities he describes.

—Stuart Twemlow, author of *Why School Anti Bullying Programs Don’t Work*

“We desperately need this book. It provides an interior view of the mind of rampage school shooters that helps us understand the origins of the narcissism, paranoia, sadism, and thwarted rage that appears to motivate them. Through the learned hands of Peter Langman, we come to understand the differences between shooters who are psychopaths and those who are schizophrenics, and why these distinctions

matter. A dispassionate, but clinically powerful analysis, *Why Kids Kill*, will be of great interest to teachers, parents, school administrators, and law enforcement officials who are responsible for prevention and treatment. Katherine S. Newman is the senior author of *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings* and the Forbes '41 Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University. "Why Kids Kill should be required reading for school counselors and administrators.... This work is a seminal contribution to child as well as adolescent psychology. Counseling Today, American Counseling Association. "Why Kids Kill is a breakthrough analysis of the psychological causes of school shootings.... a major contribution to the field of child psychology and a look into how unprocessed human pain can end in tragedy. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Peter Langman is the Clinical Director of psychology at KidsPeace ([www.kidspeace.org](http://www.kidspeace.org)), an organization that helps kids overcome emotional crises. Winner of the Pennsylvania Psychological Association's 2008 Psychology in the Media Award, he has over 20 years of experience treating at-risk youth, specializing in kids with homicidal tendencies. He has appeared on CBS, BBC, and CBC. He is the author of a number of works on mental health. Please visit [www.schoolshooters.info](http://www.schoolshooters.info).

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.

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 there 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'.

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.

As a high school social worker, from all of the research I've done on school shooters, I have found this book to be the most beneficial. It looks at the patterns seen in these kids, points out what does NOT make a mass murderer (which I feel is critical for the public to know because we really have no clue what to look for due to the wrong information thanks to the media). Dr. Langman also did an extra step that most researchers don't - he looks at the kids who almost did it. This helps expand the data that is already scarce and provides valuable information that school personnel need to be made aware of so that we can stop stereotyping what we think is a threat and start preventing those that really are

Superb book. As usual because all we hear are sound bites around school shootings. This analysis of at least 9 school mass shooters is well done with very good explanations, and is even an easy read. WE have a lot of misunderstandings. Mass School Shooters are not loners, they have good great grades and are even part school activities. One common denominator is depression, but other than that very varied issues. This book is important with its very sound recommendations for prevention of future mass school shootings.

Peter Langman has received his 15 minutes of fame multiple times and deservedly so. This well researched and timely book is a clear example of his painstaking efforts to bring to light an issue that is becoming predominantly more common as he examines the break down of society reflected in the psychological effects in today's youth and their inability to function or react in an acceptable way to the outside forces they experience as they grow up resulting in actions that have devastated too many lives and families during these stress-filled modern times.

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