A Resource for the Research of School Shooters

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Abstract
One of the biggest challenges to understanding school shooters is the difficulty obtaining valid information. As I have studied this population over the last fifteen years, I have located many documents that have been crucial to my research. For five years these documents have been available on my website (www.schoolshooters.info) so that other researchers can utilize them. The website has now been completely rebuilt as a searchable database of information and documents, with dozens of new items added. As far as I know, this is the largest collection of materials relating to school shooters that exists online. The site currently has data on seventy-six perpetrators and contains approximately two hundred documents.

Author Note
Peter Langman is the author of Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters (2009) and School Shooters: Understanding High School, College, and Adult Perpetrators (2015). Dr. Langman’s expertise on school shooters has resulted in nearly two hundred media interviews from the United States, Canada, Europe, South America, Australia, and the Middle East. He has appeared on CBS-TV, CNN, The Today Show, Fox, NPR and the BBC and been quoted in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Forbes, Yahoo News, MSNBC, USA Today, Education Week, Newsweek, and hundreds of other news outlets. His work has been cited in congressional testimony on Capitol Hill. He can be reached at peterlangman@yahoo.com
Documents

The documents on the site are organized into several categories. The categories can be browsed to see all the documents in each, or the documents can be found by various search techniques relating to the perpetrators.

Official Reports

In the wake of large-scale attacks there are often official investigations conducted by governmental or educational bodies. For example, there are official reports on the incidents at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, and Northern Illinois University, as well as less well-known attacks perpetrated by Patrick Purdy, Pekka-Eric Auvinen, and Matti Saari. The oldest official report is that on Charles Whitman, the infamous “Texas Tower sniper” who committed his attack in 1966.

Original Documents

This category includes a wide range of materials, such as records that have been released by police departments, mental health organizations, and universities. There are also dozens of court reports that reveal significant information about the perpetrators and/or their attacks. In some cases, such as those of Eric Houston and Alvaro Castillo, the court documents are the primary sources of reliable information on the shooters. In other cases, the court records provide detailed accounts of the attacks, findings from post-attack mental health evaluations, and other important information.

Original documents also include material created by the shooters: personal journals, online postings (personal and fictional), suicide notes, manifestos, letters, transcripts of their videos, and school assignments (e.g., essays, plays, short stories). These materials often provide a window into the minds of the shooters, illuminating their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and documenting their motivations for violence.

Edited Data

The purpose of the documents in this section is to bring together information from various sources and present it in a user-friendly format. For example, few people will take the time to study the thousands of pages of documents released by the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office (JCSO) related to the attack at Columbine High School. Having done so myself, I felt the need to organize the material into an easy-to-use guide. Thus, I compiled a document organized by theme, listing references to particular information within the 22,000 pages of JCSO material. Researchers can now look up references stating that Harris and Klebold were picked on, those that say they weren’t picked on, and those that say Harris and Klebold picked on others. There are also pages about Harris and Klebold’s substance use, their experiences with girls and dating, and their interest in the Nazis, as well as lists of both positive and negative comments about Harris.
and Klebold from their peers and teachers.

Smaller documents include “Themes in the Writings of Eric Harris,” “Court Cases in the Ramsey Family,” “Jeffrey Weise: A Timeline,” and “School Shooters Who Were Not White Males.” These were compiled to be handy reference tools.

Articles

This category includes articles of mine, some of which have been published elsewhere and are reprinted on the site, and others that have only been made public on the site. Several articles profile particular shooters, while others discuss multiple perpetrators. I have recently added several new articles, each profiling a shooter whom I have not presented in my other writings (Michael Slobodian, Tyrone Mitchell, Robert Butler, Jr., and Jose Reyes). There are also articles such as “Psychiatric Medications and School Shooters,” “Influences on the Ideology of Eric Harris,” “Eric Harris: The Search for Justification,” “The Search for Truth at Columbine,” and “School Shooters: The Warning Signs.”

Prevention and School Safety

The documents here address the topics of threat assessment, preventing school shootings, and creating safe school environments. The materials include two of my own writings, as well as reports by the FBI and those written in collaboration between the Secret Service and the Department of Education. Examples include, “The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective” (FBI) and “The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative” (Secret Service and Department of Education).

Searchable Database

The site can be searched in multiple ways, including demographics (age, sex, and race/ethnicity), location (city, state, or country), and whether or not the perpetrator survived the attack. The database can also be searched for attacks within a specific year or a range of years. Furthermore, the site can be searched according to my psychological typology of perpetrators (psychopathic, psychotic, or traumatized), population of shooter (secondary school, college, or aberrant adult), and attack type (targeted, random, or mixed). Finally, a search can be conducted based on the number of victims (killed, wounded or both).

These search variables can be combined in numerous ways. For example, a search could identify all attacks with ten or more victims committed by psychopathic shooters within the United States from 1994 to 2014. Once conducted, the search not only provides a list of shooters, but also provides links to all the documents on the site that relate to each shooter on the list.

Limitations of the Site

The site does not list all homicides that occur in educational settings. It focuses on multi-victim attacks at schools or
school-related settings. In some cases, there was only one victim, but the perpetrator intended to kill more than one. Even within this parameter, the site does not include every such attack. Because the purpose of the site is to provide insight into the minds and lives of the perpetrators, the focus is primarily on those shooters for whom sufficient information exists to shed light on their actions. New perpetrators and documents will continue to be added in an effort to make it as helpful as possible for those who seek to understand these terrifying attacks.