

On Killing Study Guide

On Killing by Dave Grossman (author)

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Plot Summary

This book provides a survey of what the process of training is to get people to kill and what the killing does to those who do it. The book begins with a surprising and pleasing description of how difficult it is to get humans to kill their fellow man. The book is divided into several sections, each dealing with one major aspect of the role of killing or training people to kill in a war. The author feels that as well as being of literary benefit, this book can also help many people who deal with this subject. Another main objective is to help war veterans who have combat experience, future participants, interested civilians and loved ones and therapists trying to aid them.

The author had some very discernible biases, and the good news is that he clearly expresses these to the readers. He does so without apology. Some will agree with the author and find his views comforting and familiar. Others will be offended to various degrees. Nevertheless, at least the author's biases are clear. Likewise, the author recognizes that all officers, including those such as himself who have not ever personally killed anyone, do, in fact, bear a share in the responsibility and burdens of guilt but also share in what he labels "group absolution" for combat veterans. The book is very handy for those seeking a realistic and informative look at the subject.



Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 1, Fight or Flight: Posture or Submit

Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 1, Fight or Flight: Posture or Submit Summary and Analysis

The author presents readers with his main prejudices. He expresses tremendous condemnation of divorce, as the results are always negative on children, causing there to be "something wrong with the children." He only believes in women working while their children are in school. He is also clearly prejudiced against the poor. Finally, the author of the book declares that violence on television and in the movies is to blame for increased violence. He clarifies his biases so readers will "know where he is coming from."

The author gets into the topic of killing. The first thing he shows readers is how much people do not want to "murder". He points out that even today in America, the killing of animals is necessary to protect the food supply. Not all humans react the same to this, and society has been influenced by the distancing of individuals from that process. One normal human response is to have compassion and gratitude towards the life that has been taken. Only then does he compare the killing of humans by humans to the killing of members of other species. Despite the rise of violence during the recent decades, it is still true that humans harbor a potent resistance to killing one another. During World War II, studies revealed that even when soldiers go to war, they do not wish to kill - and did not. The majority of people rely upon posturing and submission even in war. He explains that it is crucial to understand that these two acts must be added to the basic idea of "fight or flight" in order to get a realistic sense for what takes place in competitive aggression circumstances, including warfare.

Grossman explains that from this perspective, most soldiers, including infantry, will posture when at war. They will fire their weapons but will most likely simultaneously avoid "murdering" the enemy. By firing their weapons, soldiers improve their chances of keeping superior officers off their backs for "not killing the enemy." This is emphasized by stories of how firing line shooters, normally won't shoot the helpless victims unless physically urged to by someone in authority. This also forces a smaller percentage of the fighting forces to bear the burden of the deaths.



Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 2, Nonfirers Throughout History

Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 2, Nonfirers Throughout History Summary and Analysis

The author discusses the "black powder era" and records that compare the number of troops, amount of ammunition, and injuries and casualties. There were "signs" that indicate that the soldiers were not making the most of this opportunity to destroy one another. One symptom of this in several Civil War battles was that weapons were abandoned on the ground. The author argues that wet black powder wasn't the real problem.

Drills have been used for millennia as training methods to achieve automatic responses. Nevertheless, soldiers "overcome the training" and resist firing. Others fake fighting, simulating the firing actions. The author shows that "nonfiring" is a major combat concern. The most aggressive or most responsive to the authority that want or need the killing done, are the ones who do the killing. Artillery personnel and the most aggressive infantrymen, are the ones who did most of the killing in the Civil and World Wars. One can also readily observe how this translates into business, where the ones most able to get the money and control others end up with ranks of people supporting those efforts. Behaviors that express this support are ones such as literally handing the killer the gun or the ammunition for a weapon.



Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 3, Why Can't Johnny Kill?

Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 3, Why Can't Johnny Kill? Summary and Analysis

Fighter pilots had the same configuration that the ground troops had. Grossman takes readers further into inspecting the topic of soldiers' resistance to killing. There is a "conspiracy of silence" about this topic. For some, the decision is an act of conscience and of rebellion if need be. Most have the desire to "save face." For the first time, the Lt. Colonel who wrote the book brings up what is it that will make soldiers kill. The short and fast answer is that men are most ready to respond to expectations and coercions. Bear in mind, the author has not ever personally killed anyone, although he is highly decorated, has been a soldier for 20 years and has served in the infantry.



Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 4, The Nature and Source of the Resistance

Section 1, Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex: Chapter 4, The Nature and Source of the Resistance Summary and Analysis

Grossman explores the resistance to homicide. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor, noted that it was impossible to escape the sense of unity and interconnectedness with others, including opponents. Ancient Hindus had a different view. In The Bhagavad Gita the warrior Arjuna is lamenting to Lord Krishna that he is facing a war that has relatives among his opponents. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna is that all is indestructible Spirit and so no one ever need lament about any events of the flesh. Firing rates increased dramatically after World War II. The author also presented raw data that nonlethal assault and human killing of other humans have also risen dramatically during recent decades, because of changes in military conditioning practices and negative influence from mass media.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 1, The Nature of Psychiatric Casualties

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 1, The Nature of Psychiatric Casualties Summary and Analysis

Grossman says there is a known limit to how much soldiers can sustain combat activities before suffering from long-term psychological issues. Characteristic symptoms of psychiatric disorders can occur in the moment or crop up months or years later. Conversion hysteria on the battlefield is often signified by warriors behaving recklessly with amnesia, dissociations, or paralysis, often of the trigger hand or arm. Some of these can be successfully treated by getting the sufferer to talk about what led up to the events. The classic PTSD—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder—can result in nightmares or heightened sensitivities, including obsessive or compulsive disorders. Therapy and proper drugs can alleviate and often cure these conditions. The final ailment is created when the entire personality or character of the person reforms into what is generally viewed as psychopathology or sociopathology as an effective coping mechanism. Research has shown that only 2 percent of the population can sustain more than a few months duty without sustaining long-term mental damage - generally those who were already psychopathic, sociopathic or predisposed to those states.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Pyschiatric Casualties: Chapter 2, The Reign of Fear

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Pyschiatric Casualties: Chapter 2, The Reign of Fear Summary and Analysis

This chapter explores the role of fear in combatants and civilians. In World War II, nations bombed civilian targets to create distress and mental illness among enemy civilians. Instead, the people rallied together. Two of the most severe fears found among combatants is that of letting someone else down or living with the responsibility of killing. Those anxieties are the most liable to produce mental illness. The chapter also includes suggestions for how to heal individuals from psychological disorders. Time out of combat is the most effective therapy. Talking about problems with medical people, or the Chaplain or others can also bring relief.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 3, The Weight of Exhaustion

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 3, The Weight of Exhaustion Summary and Analysis

Here another major player in the combat experience is introduced and addressed, which is exhaustion - both physical and emotional. Normally, it is used as part of the breaking in and initiation procedures during military boot camp experiences. Hallucinations are not uncommon, mainly revolving around lack of food and sleep at around the 60 day mark of continuous combat. By the end of this chapter, the author has described how lack of sleep, lack of food, conditions that make men urinate or defecate in their trousers and cold wet sleeping bags all join together to create exhaustion and combat fatigue.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 4, The Mud of Guilt and Horror

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 4, The Mud of Guilt and Horror Summary and Analysis

The horror of broken bodies lying around bothers everyone. Nevertheless, the sense of responsibility is most acute for the combatants themselves. Those who did the killing really feel it and those who also have to deal with the carnage but did not cause it differentiate themselves from the horror by making the observation: "I didn't do it."



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 5, The Wind of Hate

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 5, The Wind of Hate Summary and Analysis

Here the author focuses upon the role of hatred in warfare. He opens the chapter by describing beatings, muggings and rape as being more feared by the populace than other crimes. This is because of their shock value and how personally hostile they are. This is a key to what soldiers also face on the battlefield. Suffice it to say, it is tough to not take personal a direct personal assault from the enemy.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 6, The Well of Fortitude

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 6, The Well of Fortitude Summary and Analysis

The author takes a closer look at what happens to men [and women] who are in prolonged combat conditions. Learning to sustain one another through challenges is major. At times, no one has anything more that he or she can offer. It's also unclear whether or not troubles relating to people back home are accentuate the problem.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Pyschiatric Casualties: Chapter 7, The Burden of Killing

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Pyschiatric Casualties: Chapter 7, The Burden of Killing Summary and Analysis

Pain and guilt are prominent with respect to killing. This applies in the cases of those who create the plans and issue the orders, as well as the individuals who face the task of actually doing the killing. Technology makes it easier to feel distant from the act. People who kill face bizarre social issues resulting from the extent to which it is a taboo, breaking one of the 10 Commandments of Mosaic Law and becoming a possible source of fear from their fellow man. Many feel immediate pangs of remorse, traumatized by the fact that they had killed even decades later.



Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 8, The Blind Men and The Elephant

Section 2, Killing and Combat Trauma: The Role of Killing in Psychiatric Casualties: Chapter 8, The Blind Men and The Elephant Summary and Analysis

This chapter addresses the direct effect of having killed on those combat veterans who have suffered some mental injury. Most of them can be healed, but the duration of time required varies. The author makes it clear that his willingness to treat these "legalized perpetrators" with kindness does not mean that he does not respect the toll taken upon the victims. By becoming soldiers, they will change from being "virgins" in this respect into those who "know first hand." Often those who have killed suffer from guilt over having done so. The good news is that such difficulties can be corrected, but only when those psychologists wishing to help the psychiatrically-wounded soldier face the underlying issues surrounding the realities of life and death and the gruesome nature of what has occurred.



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 1, Distance: A Qualitative Distinction in Death

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 1, Distance: A Qualitative Distinction in Death Summary and Analysis

Grossman explains the well-known relationship between distance and the psychological comfort level with committing acts of destruction against others. This is the case with respect to plants, animals and other people. Although the author is only following this topic in the realm of warfare, it is also a simplified explanation for how and why the poor are so easily oppressed by the wealthy: The wealthy are so distanced from the poor that the wealthy do not readily feel the effects of what they are doing. A chart is provided that shows the natural rise of the healthy human resistance to killing and its direct correlation to physical distance; the further the distance, the easier it is to kill. This is clearly evidenced in public by political heads taking responsibility for the decisions they make, including and especially in cases of conducting wars. This showed explicitly when King Sennacherib of Assyria destroyed the city of Babylon, including mass slaughter of the civilian populace - or in the Nazi death camps.



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 2, Killing at Maximum and Long Range: Never a Need for Repentance or Regret

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 2, Killing at Maximum and Long Range: Never a Need for Repentance or Regret Summary and Analysis

This part is devoted to distant killings. It is easier to kill from a distance, especially when it is accompanied by detachment or some form of depersonalization. This is very much the human version of how millions of today's American meat eaters have never met the butcher nor seen the places where the killing was done. They just buy and eat the meat. Most of the chapter is devoted to the use of long-range weaponry, such as artillery and bombing. Not only do these quite effectively protect those behind them, they also make the act of killing easier. The author has previously cited the fact that most officers do not directly personally kill themselves but are obviously responsible for the vast majority of it. Finally, the author admits that the effects of snipers are treated differently throughout society, given a mysterious "cold shoulder" by their own military forces after the fact. This is most probably due to the fact that it becomes extremely hard to deny that when snipers are used by a government, these are "hit men and women."



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 3, Killing at Mid - and Hand - Grenade Range

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 3, Killing at Mid - and Hand - Grenade Range Summary and Analysis

Grossman starts by showing a questioner's surprise when it turned out that only 50% of front-line infantry soldiers reported with certainty that they had killed even one opponent during their service at war. Hand grenades proved to be a favored weapon of choice during World War I. Even though their devastating effects were horrifying, they were easy to use without having to observe the damage done. The author also introduces some physiological reactions to killing - the intoxicating, euphoric effects. Apparently, remorse and regret frequently follow.



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 4, Killing at Close Range:

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 4, Killing at Close Range: Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, the officer and psychologist goes into what happens to soldiers when confronted at close range. Even at war, a huge proportion of mankind will suddenly decide not to kill. In one case, a man in Jerusalem faced an enemy, who he had no choice but to kill or be killed. He freezes but then fires, killing the young enemy soldier. After, he drops his weapon and cries. Two other "no kill" scenarios occurred in which the WWII soldiers jump into a ditch and smoke cigarettes. The last case is where a VC (Viet Cong) emerges out of the jungle in front of an American enemy. Possibly because neither expected the other, both men end up vigorously shaking their heads NO. The VC retreats into the forest, and the American soldier moves on.



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 5, Killing at Edged-Weapons Range

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 5, Killing at Edged-Weapons Range Summary and Analysis

Here the author informs readers about the actual influence of edged weapons in combat. Bladed weapons have a capacity to set off fear that is unparalleled. Second, combatants harbor an intense aversion from thrusting rather than slashing with steel weapons, as the latter only causes wounding. As they would rather not kill, even the sword bearing professional Roman Empire's foot soldiers would slash and cut their opponents rather than using thrust-to-kill tactics.

In the case of bayonets, most military personnel will convert their weapons for application of the blunted form rather than for use of the sharp edge. This aversion includes knives. The author also acknowledges that there is a sometimes subtle sexual or sexually-related energy associated with the [typically male] powers of penetration and the heterosexual male's aversion to this.



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 6, Killing at Hand-to-Hand Combat Range

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 6, Killing at Hand-to-Hand Combat Range Summary and Analysis

Hand-to-hand combat distance is second only to the sexual distance in terms of being loaded or met with "counter energy," i.e., resistance to killing. Even when done for good reason, there is often a social mark upon those involved in fatal or non-fatal injury from a hand-to-hand type of encounter. In warfare combat, participants are given little choice, creating some of the most intense and personal experiences. Grossman emphasizes killing through putting "hard to soft" on the bodies of the combatants. The two examples that he uses are: hard parts of the hand or arm to soft parts of the throat of an opponent, or hard fingers into soft orifices such as the eyeballs. Some of the resistance may rest upon awareness of the shared vulnerability.



Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 7, Killing at Sexual Range:

Section 3, Killing and Physical Distance: From a Distance You Don't Look Anything Like a Friend: Chapter 7, Killing at Sexual Range: Summary and Analysis

Grossman does not address the idea that a woman's greatest protection against rape might be her ability to kill her rapist. All such events occur at a close distance, which is known to harbor the strongest resistance against killing. The reality is that most of those concerns about rape are not relevant to the male-oriented battlefields of the world that are the focus of this book. Even so, sexual behavior and killing are associated but in a different way in the context of the chapter.

The author explains that there is power associated with guns and sexuality. Sex and killing are associated especially in male warrior culture as both constituting rites of passage—a man is a man when he is no longer a virgin and has also killed in war. Perhaps this is why countries have been able to find a steady supply of young men to go off to war. Another manner in which the two forces of sex and war are conjoined relate to male masturbation and the firing of guns. The sense of release and the loud noise are acceptably enjoyable, just as the joys of masturbation are often accepted, especially amongst men. Like firing at the enemy or actually killing, there may also be shame and fear involved. Adolescents, especially males, are known to disguise and confound their posturing about sexual activity and their actual behavior.



Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 1, The Demands of Authority: Milgram and the Military

Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 1, The Demands of Authority: Milgram and the Military Summary and Analysis

Grossman directly addresses the matter of the responsibility of those officers who have issued orders to kill but have not ever participated in the killing themselves. What they have managed to express are feelings of guilt towards those who have committed the killing. If a higher-ranking person kills, often those who had refused to comply before will fall in line and obey the order, especially when in close proximity.

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Summary and Analysis

On Killing

Summary and Analysis



Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 2, Group Absolution:

Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 2, Group Absolution: Summary and Analysis

Here the author explores the ways that groups of people protect and sanction the behavior of others. The now-deceased, former leader of Iraq held power due to realistic anxieties that the opposition would revert to oppressing the group that he was representing. When there is absolution in a group, whoever kills is alleviated of what would in other circumstances create a social stigma. Outspoken nonkillers, are more apt to be found at war protests in an effort to separate themselves from the killing that is taking place. In stark contrast, military combat killers or public officials receive social support when "a monster is stopped." While anonymity might contribute in some cases to killing outside of war, it can work for and against it on a battlefield. This is simply because responsibility is readily diffused by groups of people.



Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 3, Emotional Distance:

Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 3, Emotional Distance: Summary and Analysis

The Lt. Colonel discusses some of the psychological processes that are used to enable soldiers to be able to kill and to empower the decision makers to select battle. Every one of the methods used involves creating some greater sense of distance from the opponent. The author "as an Officer" describes how necessary for officers to love those under them but to remain sufficiently detached to enable the officers to make decisions that may endanger their own men. Cultural distinctions and ethnic and racial differences, are cited. Also, moral distancing, "punishment justification" and more significantly mechanical distancing are applicable. The Gulf War saw the rise of the type of distancing that led to the phrase "Nintendo war." Fighting was converted from daytime to night time, transforming killing to that of "green blobs" of night vision goggles.



Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 4, The Nature of The Victim: Relevance and Payoff

Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 4, The Nature of The Victim: Relevance and Payoff Summary and Analysis

In this chapter the author covers three essential factors: means, motive and opportunity. The dissuasive potential of familiarity is emphasized when at the end of the chapter there is a quote about Germans surrendering during World War II by holding out valuables and showing pictures of their families back home. In many cases this is sufficient and effective.

Warfare involves providing soldiers with relatively potent and extensive means for attacking and destroying their enemies. Ben Shalit, is cited as an expert in understanding this aspect of wartime killing. Strategies that protect the assailant from any unpleasant after effects are explored.

Assessment of the payoff for killing the victim is important. In combat, self-defense and defense of loved ones are motivating forces. When it comes to searching for the means and the opportunity, Grossman cites that attacking the opposition's morale is very helpful. This is the reason why officers and flag bearers are frequently selected for targeting, as well as buildings that reflect the ego of the victim nation.



Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 5, Aggressive Disposition of the Killer: Avengers, Conditioning and The 2 Percent Who Like It

Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 5, Aggressive Disposition of the Killer: Avengers, Conditioning and The 2 Percent Who Like It Summary and Analysis

Grossman describes the disposition of "the natural soldier." Similar to psychopaths and sociopaths, they are able to harm or kill others without regret or remorse. Most of them had experience with physical aggression during their childhoods but were not labeled as either "punked on victims", "bullies" or part of violent social groups. They also tend to be protective towards the less aggressive types of people. They're highly effectively as police officers or military soldiers, particularly in commando units.

This type of person, who is most aggressive at war or when serving as a police officer is not a violent threat to the community in which he [or she] lives. Grossman explains that these are people who are very aggressive and are empathetic with their fellow human. When the same levels of aggression are not found in union with strong sympathy and consideration of others, then the sociopath or even psychopathic temperament occurs. The first type of person (aggressive with sympathetic feelings) is ideal and rare. "Natural warriors" are as rare as true genius: a mere 1% to 2% of the human population.



Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 6, The Mathematics of Death

Section 4, An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 6, The Mathematics of Death Summary and Analysis

Here readers are shown a flow chart that shows the multiplicity of relationships influencing a person faced with a kill/no kill decision. Milgram factors in the relationship between obedience-demanding authority figures and the potential killers' respect for them, as well as cultural and social distance from the intended victim. Further, what are the strategies for removing the victim and potential pay offs? Israelis leave women out of combat circumstances, because they found that reactions to injury or loss of women was often uncontrollable. Male soldiers want to protect them. Vietnam presented American soldiers with a serious female threat, since there were large numbers of female combatants. Finally, the author cites conditioning techniques. These really changed after World War II with decisive results. Firing rates increased dramatically. Casualty rates were also changed. Simulation drills were a large part of the training and proved to greatly improve soldier's reaction in instances of real-life occurrences.



Section 5, Killing and Atrocities: No Honor Here, No Virtue : Chapters 1-4

Section 5, Killing and Atrocities: No Honor Here, No Virtue : Chapters 1-4 Summary and Analysis

The author defines atrocity as killing civilians, or people who have surrendered or retired from fighting. There are three types of atrocities: the white, the gray and the black. The white area are killings that are not atrocious actions, as when warriors achieve victory against much respected opponents who have all agreed to play by these rules. The gray area are cases where the clearest boundaries between enemy and ally are gone, as when innocents were killed in Viet Nam. The black area are executions, as in the case of POW tortures.

There are various factors that contribute to atrocities and how they're handled. There are some references to mixed messages and a short explanation of the negative impact of degrading the enemy via executions or slaughters. makes the enemy more aggressive. Dave discusses the extent of the damage caused by the ascendancy of the Soviet Left into dominance and high level of atrocities. The author concludes the chapter by describing how some can be stopped, controlled or curtailed, including threatening to kill one of an officer's own men to prevent soldiers from committing an atrocity against captives.

Grossman looks at how atrocity traps those who commit such acts by analyzing how groups gather to commit atrocities, how they're persuaded to feel empowered by it, and how men can bond through such events. Grossman implies that it is the gruesome nature of the events themselves that do the bonding. Atrocities have very limiting, self-destructive affect, once enemies get wind and become hardened against perpetrators. In 1962 in the Congo; black rebels were caught victimizing two white Nuns. UN peace keepers turned up and committed killings that were readily perceived as revenge. The tormentors each ran for their rifles with an inferior-ranking soldier delivering a kill command. Grossman uses this to reiterate on the book's most significant points that soldiers are resistant to killing even when they are well trained and faced with combat conditions.



Section 5, Killing and Atrocities: Section 5, Killing and Atrocity: No Honor Here, No Virtue : Chapter 5, The Greatest Trap of All: To Live With that Which Thou Hath Wrought

Section 5, Killing and Atrocities: Section 5, Killing and Atrocity: No Honor Here, No Virtue : Chapter 5, The Greatest Trap of All: To Live With that Which Thou Hath Wrought Summary and Analysis

The author repeats the main message of the book in that the vast majority of mankind is reluctant and resistant to killing others of the same species, with a small minority of exceptions. The closer the distance to the victim, whether physically or psychologically, the greater the disturbance to the perpetrator. Dave Grossman talks of rebellion that emerges as soldiers refuse to kill. A soldier refused to execute innocent Dutch hostages during World War Two. He was sent into the trench and executed by the others. The author's attitude about events of such a nature are commonly advocated within The Bible and other Holy Scriptures but are often mocked in society on the whole as "self-defeating idiocy."



Section 6, The Killing Response Stages: What Does It Feel Like to Kill? : Chapter 1, The Killing Response Stages

Section 6, The Killing Response Stages: What Does It Feel Like to Kill? : Chapter 1, The Killing Response Stages Summary and Analysis

Grossman focuses upon the psychological and emotional patterns that follow killing. Feelings of sorrow, remorse and often guilt emerge. What follows is a rationalization process leading to a form of self-protective which may come years later. PTSD results solely from failures in the rationalization process.



Section 6, The Killing Response Stages: What Does It Feel Like to Kill? : Chapter 2, Applications of the Model: Murder-Suicides, Lost Elections and Thoughts of Insanity

Section 6, The Killing Response Stages: What Does It Feel Like to Kill? : Chapter 2, Applications of the Model: Murder-Suicides, Lost Elections and Thoughts of Insanity Summary and Analysis

Murder-Suicides may be caused by the relationship between exhilaration and regret/remorse. This involves satisfaction and then a powerful let down. In some cases, killers can turn suicidal not from social reprisal but as a generic reaction. Many soldier-killers may also suffer from thoughts and feelings that give some impression of insanity, as in the cases of "combat addicts."



Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 1, Desensitization and Conditioning in Vietnam: Overcoming the Resistance to Killing

Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 1, Desensitization and Conditioning in Vietnam: Overcoming the Resistance to Killing Summary and Analysis

There was a major transformation in the percentage of soldiers firing their weapons due to the desensitization and conditioning training methods used by the military. The author defines desensitization activities as such things as whipping one another into a frenzy by shouting "Kill, kill, kill" together from conditioning behaviors such as wielding real weapons or engaging in realistic combat scenarios. Methods have enabled far more people to be able to function as needed and desired in combat circumstances.



Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 2, What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? The Rationalization of Killing and How it Failed in Vietnam

Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 2, What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? The Rationalization of Killing and How it Failed in Vietnam Summary and Analysis

The author begins by reminding us of the stages of killing. First is concern, second is either killing exhilaration or not killing and nonfiring, and third is remorse and regret. Group absolution is one important part of the process, and this is the one that is most likely to carry over into civilian life. Constant reassurance to the soldier is just one of the many forces needed to assist proper rationalization into the stage of acceptance that heals existing PTSD or prevents the disorder from occurring.



Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Killing in Chapter 3, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and The Cost of Killing in Vietnam

Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Killing in Chapter 3, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and The Cost of Killing in Vietnam Summary and Analysis

By the late 1990s, estimates were that at least 400,000 Vietnam veterans suffered from PTSD. The author refers to a woman named Claire. She had served as a military nurse in Burma and gone through the entire experience and decades that followed with no ill effects. When the Gulf War began, she developed PTSD symptoms. Safe disclosure, lots of bonding time and strong social support really can and does heal PTSD sufferers and proper support on the battlefields of war can and will prevent the mental ailment from setting in.



Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 4, The Limits of Human Endurance and the Lessons of Vietnam

Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 4, The Limits of Human Endurance and the Lessons of Vietnam Summary and Analysis

Grossman argues that moral direction and philosophical guidance are needed for soldiers prior to, during and after their experience in the military. He points up the Weinberger doctrine, which makes the equivalent types of arguments for deploying US military troops to combat situations and wartime conditions by setting forth strict parameters for when it is okay to do so and implying rightly that the rest of the time it is not alright to just send out military personnel to something that is not of great importance or that does not have sufficient domestic support to protect the wellbeing of the returning troops.



Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 5, What are We Doing to Our Children?

Section 7, Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers? : Chapter 5, What are We Doing to Our Children? Summary and Analysis

This chapter is devoted to desensitization of the public through the mass media and convincing readers of the magnitude of this problem. He recognizes that there has been a slightly-closeted concern surrounding the detachment from the killing of plants and animals both for our food supply and for the protection of our food supply from other animals. Of course, there are also elements that relate this clearly to other humans: resources, be they financial or emotional are involved. What the high ranking officer does in these pages is to look at society and ask: Have we somehow been doing something to our population in general that is akin to the military conditioning of the soldiers that we sent overseas?



Section 8, Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children? : Chapter 2, Desensitization and Pavlov's Dog at The Movies

Section 8, Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children? : Chapter 2, Desensitization and Pavlov's Dog at The Movies Summary and Analysis

The author shares conditioning techniques used by the military. Back in 1975, at least some of those developing conditioning training programs were including raping and pillaging. A US Naval commander used the forced watching of increasingly gruesome movies to desensitize soldiers and potential soldiers. Grossman says that the US Government denies these claims. Grossman refers to a degenerative model of authority. The first are "law and order good guy" types. The next level down will commit some vigilante acts. An example of this is when vigilantes retaliate against or capture or otherwise control a known criminal, even when the police were restricted from doing so. These are the worst version of authority figures or role models out there.



Section 8, Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children? : Chapter 3, B. F. Skinner's Rats and Operant Conditioning at the Video Arcade

Section 8, Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children? : Chapter 3, B. F. Skinner's Rats and Operant Conditioning at the Video Arcade Summary and Analysis

Grossman addresses another form of conditioning based on simulators. Nowadays these exist for ski boarding, skiing, skate boarding, and hunting of animals and humans. Learning to handle and to aim a firearm by working with the fakes does really work. Soldiers are faced with pop up targets, often shaped like people with consequences of whatever action is taken or not taken that fall along the same level of realism.



Section 8, Killing in America: What Are we Doing to Our Children? : Chapter 4, Social Learning and Role Models in the Media

Section 8, Killing in America: What Are we Doing to Our Children? : Chapter 4, Social Learning and Role Models in the Media Summary and Analysis

Social learning is used intensively by the military. In basic training, individuals undergo noninvasive methods of having their identities re-done. This is part of the initial conditioning, and although unique and designed to create soldiers, it is the same as numerous other systems of initiation and training or indoctrination used throughout history and the world. Psychological bombardment by the drill Sergeant is a specific form of intentional effect. Compliance or obedience training occurs in a very visceral way to eliminate any blockage or resistance.



Section 8, Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children?: Chapter 5, The Resensitization of America

Section 8, Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children?: Chapter 5, The Resensitization of America Summary and Analysis

There is hope for industrialized nations. Resensitization can occur when people - military and civilian - select what they take in through the media, have babies and provide safe, wholesome entertainment to their youngsters. Non-corruptive coaching and supervision can also help if elders discuss the emotional and moral content. Grossman advocates informal censorship and sublimation.



Characters

Dave Grossman

This is the book's author. He is presently a middle-aged man. When this book was published he was a professor with the University of Arkansas in military science. He had extensive prior experience in the U.S. military and had also worked for many years as a practicing psychologist. Although when he retired from the U.S. Army he was at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, he had spent time in the service as an enlisted man and as a Noncommissioned Officer, as well as an Officer increasing ranks. He worked as part of the infantry, a Ranger, a paratrooper and as a platoon leader of the 7th Infantry division. It is clear that he has devoted at least a large portion of his psychology practice to assisting veterans' recovery. He has provided information about himself to an extent that can be helpful to develop a reasonably clear sense of what his biases are.

Dave Grossman has provided this book for the general public in the sense that in-depth knowledge of any military force is not at all necessary for the work to be accessible. He does include some well known experts in the field of military history. These people who will be listed again later: Liddell Hart, Gwynne Dyer and Clausewitz.

Grossman has written this book for multiple purposes. This could double as a textbook for an introductory course or as a source of supplemental reading among officers. Of course military personnel who are not officers could also read it and gain much from it, especially if they have been, are or will be deployed to areas where there is currently active combat. The author has broached at least one or two aspects of very touchy subjects by writing this. He has addressed matters of guilt in relation to officers who make kill demands upon other men, which is a system relied upon as far back as the Roman Empire's military, even though officers do not get bloodied in battle themselves. Mainly, this book is designed to help combat veterans and their loved ones, plus those future soldiers who may well face combat to be better able to cope with the hardships involved.

Ben Shalit

Ben Shalit is a prominent Israeli. His field of expertise is military psychology, which of course has a bright side and a dark side. His work is used by the American author Dave Grossman for this book. This man's work is used to report some of why the Israeli's currently handle the women in combat issue the way they do. They found that sometimes Arab males in particular will fight to the bitter end where otherwise they might submit as a reaction to women. The Israeli military forces also found out that often male soldiers reacted so intensely to the injury and loss of their female comrades in combat that this too often led to outbreaks of uncontrolled violence on the part of the remaining colleagues. The research has shown that the presence of women and



children can inhibit combatants under certain conditions but in other scenarios it will make people more violent.

In general it has been shown that troops react to injury and to loss of their comrades at arms more dramatically against their enemies whether these people are of the same gender or are members of the opposite sex. Shalit is one of the many who has identified this as a perfectly normal response of combat veterans to circumstances.

Lord Moran

This is the author of a book titled *Anatomy of Courage*. Lord Moran's book is a source of many quotations by Grossman. This man was a World War I veteran. During the war he was a medical professional. He is able to describe in detail a few of the factors that he feels may have protected him against psychological ailments when he was at war. He declared that he most definitely suffered emotional trauma from his time at war. He also makes clear that he really was in physical danger much of the time. However, he describes the effect as he saw it of having a decidedly nonkilling role in the military.

Grossman uses Lord Moran as a classical example and as a resource when he shows readers about the distinction of the affects of the battlefield for those whose roles are nonkilling compared with those in killing roles. While the nonkillers may kill on rare occasions, no one expects them to. This simple difference has an intense effect according to Grossman.

Anonymous Sergeant of the 101st Airborne

This is a man who serves as an excellent example in the book. He had served in a killing role in World War II. He had been troubled by those experiences. He did choose to serve in two additional wars: Korea and Vietnam. However, in these later wars he chose a healing role. In truth, he worked as a field medic or some similar role. He described the behaviors and results as extraordinary in their therapeutic effects. The fact that he had functioned as a destroyer of life before only made him enjoy being a protector of life all the more and helped him to purify himself.

This is a great reminder to everyone that people can operate in both modes. It is also helpful to see how true it is that those forced into killing roles typically have not lost their appreciation for life and love. Even though we do not get his exact name, we still see how important his truth is.

King Sennacherib of Assyria

This man was an ancient King of the nation of Assyria. He annihilated the city of Babylon in 689 BC. His destructive policy was entire and merciless. He both put out orders for his soldiers to kill every single member of the population they found, making no distinction between combatants and civilians but slaughtering them all. In addition to



ordering the inhabitants killed, he also had the city's walls torn or battered down to a state of uselessness. This was true of both the inner and outer walls. He also had the military forces under him tear down the temples and other buildings in the city. The King clearly accepted full responsibility for issuing such orders to human soldiers.

Grossman's book, and not the Assyrian King, address what this meant for those men who received such orders and were forced to or chose to comply with such unbridled massacre of their enemies.

John Keegan

One of two authors of a book called *Soldiers* that Grossman uses pervasively as reference material for his book. The predominant feeling that is described for those who have been placed in the killing role is one of direct personal responsibility. In one of the quotes used, the story relayed is of a soldier being in a combat situation and finding that he feels it sink in that there is an enemy who he is going to have to kill. In one case it the story of a Jordanian. Shortly thereafter is an entirely different example of a soldier who was forced to kill a boy because the child was about to kill the adult soldier with an automatic rifle.

This is one of the many examples used by Grossman to show how the stages of killing turn up, contextualized. Responsibility shows that the combat veteran recognizes that he is in a killing role. However, there may be a sense of the possibility of avoidance combined with the concern: to not kill or to kill. Then in the former case, the kill demand in the example has been placed strongly enough that the soldier does not require to have the demand shouted to him. He feels satisfaction followed by remorse. The second sample is far worse because the demand to kill is far more repugnant to the soldier because with most adults the resistance to kill youths is higher under most conditions than it is to kill others of the same age or older. Because the enemy is just a boy, the soldier experiences the regret and remorse stage right along with any kind of exhilaration because he has just saved his own life and defeated an opponent who was about to fire at him.

Richard Holmes

Richard Holmes is the other author of the book *Soldiers*. As such, all of the information listed with Keegan also applies. Grossman has used quotations from *Soldiers* to provide context and samples to readers of *On Killing*. It also does a great job at showing how some of these subject cross readily across wars and generations. This is done in tandem with the recognition in *On Killing* that there are features of war that have unarguably changed through time, and that the next generations' warfare conditions are apt to be in some respects distinctive but in other ways, there is a universality to war, not matter the time or place.



Richard Heckler

This man is cited by the author Grossman as another book author. He comes up in chapter one as one source for the idea of the "fight or flight response," which Grossman then goes on to examine in more detail. Heckler's book is *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*.

Ardant du Picq

This Frenchman was a pioneer in military science, conducting research that had never been done before. If it had been done, the methods had been less systematic and the results less reliable. Ardant du Picq is cited repeatedly during the length of the entire book. Even if much of what he learned had already been known, it had not been well organized or presented to others as a body of knowledge.

Paddy Griffith

This person is mentioned only in the very beginning of the book. One of the key observations made by Paddy and many others is that soldiers in combat have transformed killing into potent posturing by the firing of their weapons. They feel release especially when they won't or can't kill the enemy. The combination of the noise and release of powerful posturing and its simultaneous avoidance of any lethal confrontation made the firing of guns a preferred choice over the typically more lethal use of the bow. This was observable in the American Civil War and also explains why in Vietnam, American soldiers expended 50,000 rounds of ammunition per enemy casualty when the efficient sniper would expend fewer than 2 rounds of ammunition on average to achieve the same result. The noise and shower of bullets does often scare the enemy away.

Douglas Graham

A medic with the First Marine Division in Vietnam definitely noticed during his tour of duty how much members of the opposing teams could fire their weapons without anyone being hurt by the ammunition. People were killed and injured but clearly much of the shooting, like shouting, was for effect, to please superior officers, to posture, and because of the success of the squeeze-the-trigger training. In this sense, gun firing was, to use a sexual metaphor, like a great deal of male masturbation.

General S.L.A. Marshall

This fellow is also referenced repeatedly at different points in the book. Here he notes that in earlier wars, those who would fire, and those who would shoot to kill noticed those around them who would not. However, one of Marshall's many observations that



Grossman refers to is that this has been consistently true in most wars. Also, those who would kill often did not get upset by the nonfirers. However, those who would kill the enemy ended up bearing more responsibility for this aspect of combat. They were usually strongly supported by the rest, and forced to do more than their fair share of the killing. General Marshall is referred to as a highly reputable resource of information at various times during the course of the book.

Richard Gabriel

According to Grossman, this is one of the premier military psychologists of our present day. Unlike Ben Shalit, who is Israeli, the author implies that Richard Gabriel is American but does not explicitly state this. The name appears during the discussion of nonfirers throughout history very early in the book.

F. A. Lord

Author of the Civil War Collector's Encyclopedia, the tendency to evade lethal confrontations even among soldiers in real live war combat was revealed in a different way. Over 27,000 muskets were found abandoned after the Battle of Gettysburg and over 90% of these were loaded and at least 50% were usable. F. A. Lord only comes up early in the book.

Colonel Milton Mater

A World War II veteran who made the same observation as General Marshall. Part of the leadership of troops during warfare was the need to deal with nonfirers and getting soldiers to genuinely attack the enemy. He was informed of this by World War I veterans. Also, the difference between firing at the enemy and being aware of killing are two different things. The mid-range and long-range hide this best since soldiers can honestly assert that they fired but deny awareness of whether or not they killed. Late in the book Mater's observation comes up in the kill vs. no kill distinction when firing does take place. In Vietnam, at least once, soldiers feigned obedience to a kill order against civilians by firing their weapons without harming a single person. Their field commander was only able to get them to obey his order when he directly and genuinely shot and killed some of those he had ordered his men to kill. This reflects a commonly found aspect of battlefield psychology.



Objects/Places

Lake Wobegon

A fictive location popularized by Garrison Keillor. It is often true to life and strives to be quintessentially America. This is a famous town in America even though it does not exist in the factual world. Grossman refers to it in the introduction.

Washington Post Newspaper

A highly reputable newspaper in America. The author refers to it during the introduction to show extreme anti-killing ideologies that are part of the confluence of influences in contemporary American society. This view will become important as Grossman shows how it can pose a danger to soldiers and recovering veterans of combat.

Black Powder muskets

These were a weapon used in the American Civil War. They had bayonets attached at the end. Both of these weapons turned out to be most effective in enhancing the posturing techniques used by the foot soldiers as people on both sides were terrified by these. Of the two, the soldiers tended to even more frightened about and repulsed by the idea of being killed by and being forced to kill using the bayonet than they were about the bullets. While this was clear during the Civil War, the same issue manifests far later in the book during the edged-weapon section. The fact that the bayonet is designed to be used as a thrusting, bladed weapon has the power to make more combat soldiers squeamish about injuring and killing their opponents than most other weapons possibly could.

M-16

This automatic machine gun that was developed and maintained as a standard rifle for combat military forces is referred to in the Section on Killing and Physical Distance in the chapter Killing at Close Range. These are used internationally, but are recognizable as belonging to certain troops throughout the world.

AK-47

The AK-47 is also a fully automatic machine gun. It is also found internationally as a standard military firearm. However, it is the counterpart to the M-16s with respect to political alliances. Hence: if you find troops with AK-47s, they won't have M-16s, unless they have taken them from the enemy. Of course private collectors may have both but in the present decades this firearm is almost as good as a flag or a color-coded team shirt



to let you know whose political and military team this is. When you find M-16s are the standard, the AK-47 is the enemy's unless you have taken control of enemy weaponry.

Green Beret

This is a specialized type of American fighting sub-group. It is referred to in the middle of the book.

Phalanx

This was a new form of tight military formation when it first came into creation. It provided a high measure of accountability among those within the formation and facilitated their success through mutual surveillance. This came about prior to the Roman Empire but after the successful use of the chariot as an archer-wielding, mobile war weapon of the ancient world.

Pub

This is the common name for a British thing. The word is short for public house. It was designed to make it so that work colleagues, neighbors and the like could get together even though the norm was that people lived in crowded housing with large families. The public house meant that people could meet without getting in the way at home. This being the case, they are not, or were not merely British bars since, unlike American bars, Pubs are meant to have space where women and children are safe and welcome as well as space for women and men. Alcohol and food and nonalcoholic beverages are normally served there. As such, men from work, entire families, and the women with the kids are all people who would be welcome and typical pub customers.

Combat Addiction

This is a condition that comes about when either soldiers find their greatest relief from the after affects of having killed or seriously injured opponents in combat by going back and again hurting or killing. This causes them to ride through the emotions of the killing stages in a way that with repetitions may become cyclic. If the soldiers are forced into or get attached to a cyclic form of this "addiction," then they may turn into combat addicts in a way similar to how alcoholics or any other addicts fall off the wagon. This can be true of earning and spending, movies, sex, intoxicating substances, romances and also military combat or just fighting or some violent sports training. This can be cured, but the soldier will have to come down and stay that way and may be helped by knowing what is going on with him [or her]. Many combat addicts may not be very clear on why they are behaving and feeling as they are.



PT

PT: this means "Physical Training". This is military terminology for systematic physical exercise programs.

Psychiatric Casualties

These are people who have suffered no physical injury, or none that has not healed, but there remains some problem. Their mental and emotional anguish is a direct consequence of their combat exposure. These can take place during combat and some forms of it can remain or can emerge after the combat has ended. These are curable, but with the understanding that there is no going back to some kind of what he [or she] was like before. Rest, physical safety, reassurance and rationalization are the best known and most powerful recovery therapies for psychiatric casualties. Discussion and sharing of what has transpired and feelings about it are also very helpful.

Dear John Letters

These are a colloquial name for personal letters in which a girlfriend, wife or lover informs her soldier that she is breaking up with him, or will no longer be faithful. They have diverse forms but have been known through multiple wars. These turn up late in the book and often appear in the lives of soldiers who have been away for what the letter writer may feel has been too long.

PTSD

This is an acronym for the psychiatric ailment Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This can be cured and prevented. There are times when civilians may suffer from this if exposed to excessively frightening media imagery. Discussion and emotional reassurance are very helpful. The social response to returning combat veterans, and with crime victims, is typically very important in preventing or curing PTSD. The more supportive of the veteran or crime victim that the society is the more rapidly and completely that individual is able to get rid of PTSD symptoms.

It is important to keep in mind that no one needs to get PTSD and that it is curable. It comes up in the book among the types of psychiatric casualties and then later when the general populace's response to PTSD is shown to either help or to hinder the sufferer's condition. This does not mandate that the sufferer cannot heal alone, but the help and care of others tends to improve recovery exponentially. For many war veterans, an unhelpful response from civilians upon their return was at least 50% of the source of how and why they suffered from the war.



Themes

Resensitizing Society: Purifying our Veterans and Protecting

One major theme of this book is to look a serious problem square in the eye and seek solutions that don't shy away from the difficulty. The author names the trouble: our society has become desensitized and excessively violent. The other aspect of this difficulty has two forms. One form is that there are combat veterans who have to be able to hurt and kill others in order to fulfill their missions while also helping one another to survive. These have to deal with combat and then, all of the survivors return home where they and their society need to deal with what has happened. Purifying our veterans means "re-civilianizing" them and healing them by helping them cope and recover from what they have been through. This also often requires accepting that they have been changed by their experiences. Protecting our youth is about changing a trend in the current culture to reduce future violence.

To resensitize means, among other things to look at the way information moves through society and to alter the way that it is moving into a healthier pattern of motion. To use the visual media as an example, the violent images of some videos and other shows have desensitized much of the viewing audience and simply upset as many or more. Sharing of feelings about the emotionally-upsetting aspects of even films can help prevent excessive anxieties from growing in viewers after the film has ended. Another way is for viewers to work with stations and with their/our dollars to select safer films and to encourage G rated movies that are entertaining for the whole family to become acceptable among teens and adults who do not have young children, as well as them being acceptable for adults with young children.

Resensitizing a veteran means to reassure them that they can come back safely into society. Readers need to keep in mind that one of the most glaring features of combat is that it isn't safe and therefore the soldiers, even those who killed very effectively have a burning desire to find safe space and emotional reassurance as they recalibrate themselves to a civilian lifestyle. Helping veterans to mourn and to affirm the good feelings that they experienced, as well as validating their various types of sadness, fear, remorse, rage and any other feelings, helps them to come into a new phase. Keep in mind that military service and war are both life events that tend to cause permanent change in people. As such, mourning what has been lost while discovering who and how someone has changed is part of the purification of returning warriors.

Through these efforts, the author tells us that we can resensitize our communities in ways that will effectively reduce aggravated assault as well as various types of homicide, especially the kinds that are not purely self-defense. Such an achievement really will make our world a better and safer place for those who have fought for us and for those we wish to prevent from ever needing to face the fear and struggle of combat.



Training Military Soldiers

Another major theme of this book is the training of military personnel from raw recruits into well-honed, beginner soldiers. The first quality that the author Grossman addresses contradicts the myth of the fearsome soldier but is supported by a large extent of the majority's life experiences. That is the thankfully high resistance that most humans have against killing one another. Most angry people don't really want to kill their opponent but they might even temporarily believe they do. Given the right conditions, most would find out that they desire some kind of retaliation or to induce hurt but that actual homicide is further than they wish to go. In fact, in order to make it so that soldiers will kill but will only ever do so under orders is how training works. For the profoundly naive, it is worth noting that the vast majority of military personnel are not the ones intended to directly confront the enemy through their personal violence. For the less naive: even in the infantry and other groups who are the real fighters of the military a lot of them are not that likely to kill, even in combat.

In order to understand how to train soldiers, Grossman starts here, at the resistance to the grim necessity of killing. During the course of the book he goes into two or three of the most prominent forms of training. Classical and operant conditioning are drilled into the recruits through repetition to encourage the desired reflexive responses. Removing the need to think will give life-saving time in emergencies and compliance will spare soldiers from loss of life or limb due to hesitation. Even with all this re-wiring of the human mind, Grossman tells readers that once deployed to a battle field, most soldiers will find their training helpful but will largely revert to their core behavior. This only emphasizes the need to understand the training and how beneficial it is for it to sink in as deeply into the individual as possible. Operant conditioning, which is as full-bodied and multisensory as possible is linked with desensitizing chants such as "Kill, kill, kill;" this sort of thing is all part of the repertoire of training soldiers to kill.

Managing Killing and No-Kill Responses on the Battlefield

This is yet another major theme in the book. By delineating the killing process and what can happen for those who do kill and for those who do not, soldiers in combat are enabled by what they learn here to help their comrades. The Lt. Colonel has made it clear that one can learn to recognize what is going on with a given soldier within a combat situation. People can learn to discern the signs of any given stage in the killing process and can help to normalize relations by learning to provide at least the reassurance and awareness among comrades that this is rather normal or it is likely that you feel this way now; later you will be likely that way. This can most certainly help those actually engaged in the fighting to feel more secure that they are not suddenly and mysteriously losing it, and that many of their reactions and responses are documented norms. This is why the author provides a run down of the 5 stages of killing. The first of which is the concern with the ability to kill or the lack thereof. For those who do not; if this is readily rationalized, then the soldier will not have much



mental trouble. If the person's efforts to rationalize the decision fail, then the individual is liable to suffer from some PTSD symptoms until the proper mind shielding or thought assembly is brought back into the form that effectively protects the individual against such symptoms. Next stages are anxiety, then rationalization and calming with acceptance, or else killing with exhilaration/euphoria caused by success, followed often rapidly by remorse and regret. After that comes rationalization and acceptance. If rationalization fails, the soldier will be liable to suffer from PTSD symptoms until proper rationalization occurs, probably with external assistance and reassurance. Many soldiers can feel very bizarre if they suffer from sickness and exhilaration at the same time, two feelings that many intravenous heroin users describe as occurring together quite strongly when a dose is first taken. It is important to point out to soldiers that they are not really crazy for feeling victorious and proud while also grieving and feeling sad because they have just killed an enemy soldier.

No-kill responses in combat also vary and must be faced. Soldiers will have a variety of these. There may be cases where a foot soldier feels at peace with this but other times when he or she faces turmoil surrounding a no-kill response to a kill situation. Customary no-kill responses are remaining down but uninjured—such as lying in a ditch and taking no further action or finding out all there is to know about cleaning or re-loading one's firearm, or perhaps better still, finding out that one can help another soldier load his weapon rather than fire one's own at the actual enemy, who is now noticeably human and quite possibly close to the same age. While a veteran might feel fantastic about not firing or being attacked by someone eating a meal or when two soldiers unexpectedly cross paths on a beautiful, peaceful morning, another person might suffer from feelings of shame and horror about the inability to kill when the nearest comrade just took a bullet in the shoulder, or there is a wave of screams because an explosive just tore up two units of men...and now the culprit is that man or woman driving away...right into the soldiers' sights. To not kill or to have not killed at times like those might be disturbing for the combat personnel or veteran.

Style

Perspective

The author provides a very clear sense of perspective to his readers through his self-presentation, which includes a set of his personal values. He has a few qualities that make him ideal for serving as a reliable and knowledgeable expert in this topic and at least one characteristic that some would argue makes him unfit to speak on the subject. Just as Lord Jesus, the celibate virgin, spoke on the subject of sex and romance, Lt. Colonel has not directly killed anyone but has given numerous orders in his role as a military man that caused people to kill and injure, as well as having caused some of his own people to be injured or even killed. He has also functioned as a psychologist and has conducted substantial study. For these reasons, in addition to his 20 years of military experience and his education in subject matter, he is in a strong position to be viewed as a respectable and reliable source of information on this topic as presented in this book.

Tone

The tone of the book is predominantly objective but not clinically impersonal. There is a tenor of compassion running through the whole book, which is very intentional. The book is organized and comes across as being designed for casual or educational purposes. Someone might read it to help a loved one who is a combat veteran or someone to be up to date in their profession. Likewise, military officers or those lower down in the ranks might find it very helpful for their own recovery from or function in combat. It is also structured so that it could be used as an educational resource in military academies and OCS locations.

Structure

The book is divided into 8 different sections. Within each, there are quite short chapters, which help to keep the subtopics rather easily defined. It first addresses something which is somehow both very well known and unknown: that for the most part, not even trained, armed warriors want to kill, and if they do kill, they often get sick afterwards and feel badly.

Each section addresses both issues relating to the need for our society to have at least some people who will kill opposition when necessary and the coexisting desire to minimize killing and to protect ourselves from it. Likewise, the author shows how the military makes efforts to promote killing under very tight reins. The rest of the work is devoted, together in the same sections, with how to best deal with the very real unpleasant side effects of any given soldier's ineffectiveness or effectiveness with respect to killing.

As stated above, the book is structured to serve a small variety of specialized purposes. It can come across as excessively broken up, but the over all effect is that this clarifies matters. This can be handy if using it for training purposes or for helping friends.

The book begins and ends with society on the whole. Between, the focus is on the combat veteran and those soldiers trained for combat. Not all combat veterans have killed anyone. In fact, a great number have not, however surprising this might be to the uninformed. Those who have killed have special conditions and emotions that need to be addressed. Those who have not also have needs. En masse, the two distinct types of combat veterans are aware of one another. If they have served in battle together, their sense of this will have been sharpened. The acknowledgment of their needs and of the differences in their needs caused by the circumstances are highly significant. The book bravely takes readers through an involved process—one that is very personal and individual in some ways, yet sociologically and institutionally, it is a subject that affects us all.

Quotes

"It is vital that future soldiers understand that this is a normal and very common response to the abnormal circumstances of combat, and they need to understand that their feelings of satisfaction at killing are a natural and fairly common aspect of combat," Section 6: The Killing Response Stages: What Does it Feel Like to Kill? Chapter 2: Applications of the Model: Murder-Suicides Lost Elections, and Thoughts of Insanity, p.243

"The point is that this program of desensitization conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms, combined with subsequent participation in a war may make it possible to share the guilt of killing without ever having killed," Section/Book 7: Killing in Vietnam: Chapter 1: Desensitization and Conditioning in Vietnam," p. 260.

"In the same way, the American Indians considered 'counting coup', or simply touching their enemy to be far more important than killing," Book/Section 1: Killing and the Existence of Resistance: Chapter 1: Fight or Flight, Posture or Submit, p. 13.

"Goodbye, sicko....W. Norris 'Rhodesia Fireforce Commandos' [to one of his own men]," Section/Book 2: Killing and Combat Trauma: Chapter 1: The Nature of Psychiatric Casualties, p. 46

"There was a lull in the battle, during which Metelmann saw two Russians coming out of their foxhole," Section/Book 4: An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered: Chapter 2: Group Absolution, p.158

"There is such a thing as a 'natural soldier'....Gwynne Dyer [from Dyer's book entitled War]," Section/Book 4: An Anatomy of Killing: Chapter 5: Aggressive Predisposition of the Killer Avengers, Conditioning, and the 2 Percent Who Like It," p.180

"Therefore we do not judge them as criminals," Section/Book 3: Killing and Physical Distance: Chapter 2: Killing at Max. & Long Range, p. 107

"...only 1percent of U.S. fighter pilots accounted for nearly 40% of all enemy pilots shot down in World War II; the majority apparently did not shoot anyone down or even try to," Section/Book 3: Killing and Physical Distance: Chapter 2: Killing at Max. Range, p. 110

"This is a fairly typical response by veterans to those who ask about their personal kills," Section/Book 3: Killing and Physical Distance: Chapter 3: Killing at Mid- and Hand-Grenade Range p. 111

"...now the killer must shoot at a person and kill a specific individual. Most simply cannot or will not do it," Section/Book 3: Killing and Physical Distance: Chapter 4: Killing at Close Range p. 119.



Topics for Discussion

What can be done to prevent the war atrocity of rape, along with other atrocities? What are two ways that victims and their countrymen can recover from atrocities committed against their civilians as well as their military captives?

What are the 5 stages of killing? Describe both the prominent idea and the most relevant emotions to each stage.

Why does PTSD occur? How can it be cured? (this means curing the cause of the symptoms not just treating the symptoms).

What are symptoms of PTSD? How can these be controlled or reduced?

Describe the power of humanity's resistance to killing one another, be it in war time or as crime. Show how this remains an observable force within combat and by trained soldiers.

Describe the steps of the process necessary for an individual to be able to process having killed a fellow human being without suffering from PTSD.

Briefly define each of the following: 1) group absolution, 2) demands to kill, 3) proximity of respected authority, then provide a short explanation of why a combat soldier will choose to not kill or to kill in various "kill situations."

Describe the process of killing and not killing in a "kill circumstance" that will lead to successful acceptance and the other route that will lead to PTSD.

What is your opinion of Grossman's claim that media violence has led to the increase in recorded or reported violent crimes throughout the industrial world? Show his view. Also, write at least one sentence on how this is possible during an era where there is no longer family style animal slaughter, nor corporal punishment in most schools since those both clearly show a reduction in the level of violence in these very same countries.