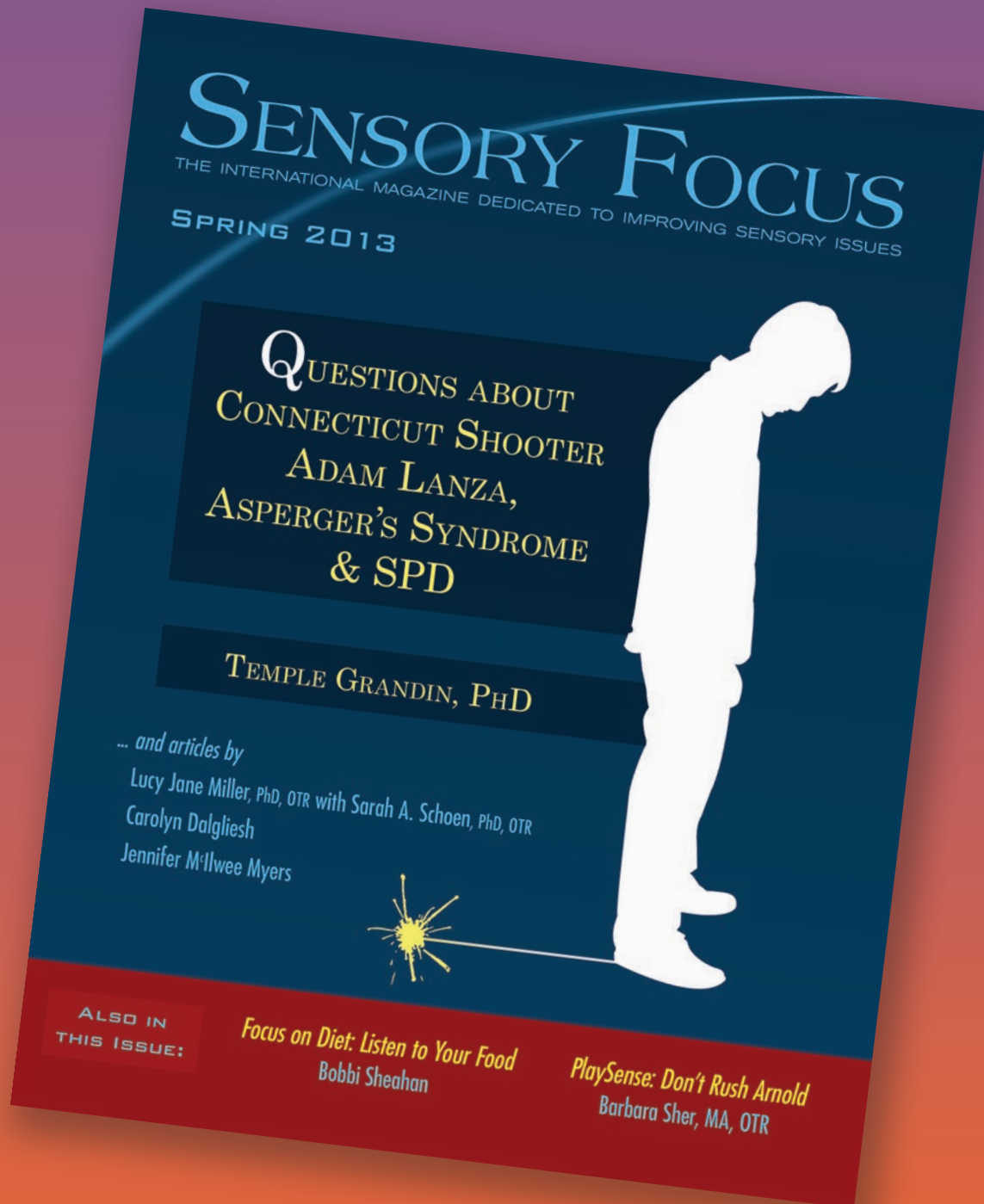


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QUESTIONS ABOUT CONNECTICUT SHOOTER ADAM LANZA, ASPERGER'S SYNDROME & SPD

TEMPLE GRANDIN, PhD

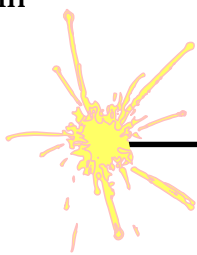
Many people in the special-needs community are concerned about news reports that indicate Adam Lanza, the gunman who killed the children and teachers at the school in Connecticut, had Asperger's syndrome and perhaps Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). They fear that this information will make the public think that individuals with these disorders are inherently violent.

There is a wide range of people on the autism spectrum. They range from prodigies—the likes of Einstein, Mozart, and Steve Jobs—to individuals who remain nonverbal. Half of the computer programmers in Silicon Valley may have some signs of autism. However, the vast majority of folks on the spectrum are peaceful and nonviolent.

SPD affects an even wider variety of people. Individuals who have SPD and many different diagnoses or labels may have sensory issues such as sound sensitivity, difficulty screening out background noise, or visual sensitivity to fluorescent lights. SPD can occur in conjunction with autism, dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, speech delay, and learning problems.

I have read extensive articles about Adam Lanza on the Internet. Here is some of his history that may be pertinent to his violent outburst.

When Adam was attending his local school, he was super shy and would not allow his picture to be put in the yearbook. During his years there he showed no violent tendencies, and he was really good with computers. His life rapidly went downhill after his parents' divorce.



Adam stopped attending school and became a recluse in his mother's basement. He spent all day playing violent video games and did not participate in any activities except for shooting a gun at a local firing range. He had no other interests.

The gun he shot at the range was the same gun he shot in the video games he played. In my opinion, he was probably visiting some really horrible Web sites, because prior to the shootings, he completely destroyed his computer's hard drive so investigators could not determine what he had been doing on his computer or what sites he had been visiting prior to the school shooting.

What should have been done to help Adam before the shooting occurred?

First and most importantly, Adam Lanza's parents should have forced him to get out of the house and find a job. Whether he liked it or not, he should have been working to develop other interests. He was good with computers, and he could have been working at a local computer store. There is a tendency for some people on the spectrum to become recluses. They have to get out into the world. Video-game playing needs to be restricted to 1 hour a day, as it draws people away from reality.

Second, boys need a good male role model. A good male role model would have dragged this kid out of the basement before he descended into his sick world and began shooting people.

Third, people on the spectrum get obsessed with their favorite things. Teachers and

Lanza been encouraged to develop his talents and interests, socialize with others, and turn his skills into being able to earn an honest living, perhaps he could have made a life for himself that turned out very differently. ♦

By themselves, autism and the sensory issues that go along with SPD do not make a person violent.

parents must direct obsessions toward positive things that can translate into building careers and fulfilling lives.

There are some individuals, like me, who have extreme problems with anxiety and panic attacks. Taking a small dose of an antidepressant worked wonders for me. There is further information on this in my book, *Thinking in Pictures*.

When I was in high school, I had anxiety and tended to be a recluse. Both my mother and teacher did NOT allow this. They made me get out, be with other people, and develop my own interests and talents.

By themselves, autism and the sensory issues that go along with SPD do not make a person violent. Had Adam

Temple Grandin, PhD, is an internationally respected specialist in the design of livestock handling systems. She is also the most famous person with autism in the world today. She was recently named one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people and is the subject of the award-winning 2010 HBO biopic. Temple has authored several books on autism and is a worldwide speaker on autism topics. Her website is www.templegrandin.com.