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## **Coverage of 'School Shootings' Avoids the Central Issue**

**By Jackson Katz**

In the many hours devoted to analyzing the recent school shootings, once again we see that as a society we seem constitutionally unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge a simple but disturbing fact: these shootings are an extreme manifestation of one of contemporary American society's biggest problems – the ongoing crisis of men's violence against women.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, so let's take a good hard look at these latest horrific cases of violence on the domestic front. On September 27, a heavily armed 53-year-old man walked into a Colorado high school classroom, forced male students to leave, and took a group of girls hostage. He then proceeded to terrorize the girls for several hours, killing one and allegedly sexually assaulting some or all of the others before killing himself.

Less than a week later, a heavily armed 32-year-old man walked into an Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania and ordered about 15 boys to leave the room, along with a pregnant woman and three women with infants. He forced the remaining girls, aged 6 to 13, to line up against a blackboard, where he tied their feet together. He then methodically executed five of the girls with shots to the head and critically wounded several others before taking his own life.

Just after the Amish schoolhouse massacre, Pennsylvania Police Commissioner Jeffrey B. Miller said in an emotional press conference, "It seems as though (the perpetrator) wanted to attack young, female victims."

How did mainstream media cover these unspeakable acts of gender violence? The New York Times ran an editorial that identified the "most important" cause as the easy access to guns in our society. NPR did a show which focused on problems in rural America. Forensic psychologists and criminal profilers filled the airwaves with talk about how difficult it is to predict when a "person" will snap. And countless exasperated commentators – from fundamentalist preachers to secular social critics – abandoned any pretense toward logic and reason in their rush to weigh in with metaphysical musings on the incomprehensibility of "evil."

Incredibly, few if any prominent voices in the broadcast or print media have called the incidents what they are: hate crimes perpetrated by angry white men against defenseless young girls, who – whatever the twisted motives of the shooters – were targeted for sexual assault and murder precisely because they are girls.

What is it going to take for our society to deal honestly with the extent and depth of this problem? How many more young girls have to die before decision-makers in media and other influential institutions stop averting their eyes from the lethal mix of deep misogyny and violent masculinity at work here?

In response to the recent spate of shootings, the White House announced plans to bring together experts in education and law enforcement. The goal was to discuss "the nature of the problem" and federal action that can assist communities with violence prevention.

This approach is misdirected. Instead of convening a group of experts on "school safety," the president should catalyze a long-overdue national conversation about sexism, masculinity, and men's violence against women.

For us to have any hope of truly preventing not only extreme acts of gender violence, but also the incidents of rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence that are a daily part of millions of women's and girls' lives, we need to have this conversation. And we need many more men to participate. Men from every level of society need to recognize that violence against women is a men's issue.

A similar incident to the Amish schoolhouse massacre took place in Canada in 1989. A heavily armed 25-year-old man walked into a classroom at the University of Montreal. He forced the men out of the classroom at gunpoint, and then opened fire on the women. He killed fourteen women and injured many more, before committing suicide.

In response to this atrocity, in 1991 a number of Canadian men created the White Ribbon Campaign. The idea was for men to wear a white ribbon as a way of making a visible and public pledge "never to commit, condone, nor remain silent about violence against women." The White Ribbon Campaign has since become a part of Canadian culture, and it has been adapted in dozens of countries.

After the horrors in this country over the past two weeks, the challenge for American men is clear: will we respond to these recent tragedies by averting our eyes and pretending that none of this happened? Or will we at long last break our complicit silence and work together with women to turn these tragedies into a transformative cultural moment?

*Jackson Katz is an educator, author and filmmaker who has long been recognized as one of America's leading anti-sexist male activists. His groundbreaking new book, "The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help," was published by Sourcebooks in 2006.*

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