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Commentary: There's a Label for Girls' Deaths

By Mike Hendricks, The Kansas City Star



**Mike
Hendricks**

The story that touched our hearts this week was about 10 little girls shot point-blank in Pennsylvania's Amish country.

Not 10 children, as some news reports put it. But 10 girls. The shooter wanted to harm only the girls.

Does it strike you as curious – the way it did me – that more wasn't made of that?

Had he singled out and shot 10 black men or 10 Jews or 10 gays or 10 of almost any other group, we'd be calling it a hate crime – whether it fit the legal definition or not.

And on the talk shows and in the newspapers, wouldn't the question have been asked over and over, "What causes such intolerance, bigotry and bitter resentment against one type of people?"

But the shooter at Nickel Mines, Pa., singled out his victims based on gender. And I found only one article that used the term "hate crime," and it said that the killings merely "followed the pattern" of a hate crime.

Gee, you mean like the crime committed a week earlier in Bailey, Colo., when a sex offender burst into another school, singled out the girls, then molested them and killed one before turning the gun on himself – that kind of hate crime?

Or any number of other killings, rapes and beatings committed by males against females purely because they were female?

We didn't hear the Nickel Mines story framed that way. Instead, the first question was, "Did he have a grudge against the Amish?"

And when the answer turned out to be "no, the Amish were simply convenient victims," public discussion turned to the peculiarities of the case. To the spread of school violence. To the need for gun control.

Hard saying why the broader theme of violence against women didn't come up more.

Certainly, the National Organization for Women saw it that way. The group has been trying for years to pass legislation that would make gender-based violence part of hate-crime laws.

"Every woman saw this and said, 'Oh, my God, they sent all the boys away and targeted all the girls,'" NOW President Kim Gandy told me Thursday.

Maybe it's because we so often hear of crimes perpetrated by men against women that it tends to wash over us. We see the killer in Pennsylvania as just one more sicko taking out his anger on the opposite gender, rather than as a pattern of violence.

That's what women's groups and advocates for victims of domestic violence have been saying for years.

Too many of us would rather isolate crimes against women, rather than look at them the way many women do – as just more evidence that they are victims of hatred by men in general.

It's easier than facing the fact that there's a sickness in this society in need of a cure.

What that cure is, I don't know.

A starting point would be to recognize misogyny for what it is. And then to give its victims names.

That's the purpose of a report issued this week by the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence.

You can read "Beyond Statistics: Lethal Domestic and Sexual Violence Against Women" by going online at <http://www.kcsdv.org/clipfolder.pdf>.

But be forewarned. If you're like me, it'll make you depressed and angry as you read the names, ages and circumstances of 21 women murdered by their husbands and boyfriends over the past two years in Kansas.

Every story is different. But like those schoolgirls in Pennsylvania, as a group it's clear why these women were singled out for death.

They just happened to have been born female.

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