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K-STATE STUDENT'S MASTER'S THESIS DEALS WITH SERIAL RAPIST

MANHATTAN — Kristen Kendrick, graduate student in sociology, Leawood, has learned that the women of Manhattan crave information.

While researching Manhattan's serial rapist — a man responsible for seven rapes in Manhattan in the past seven years — for her master's thesis in sociology, Kendrick interviewed 25 local women and found that, while the women were aware of the existence of the serial rapist, they hungered for more reliable information about the crime.

"Many of the women themselves said they got the information about the serial rapist from friends," Kendrick said. "Most were skeptical about hearing information second-hand, but they were still wanting information from reliable sources. What they wanted was more frequent information from newspapers, the university and the local police."

Kendrick first got interested in exploring this topic during the summer between finishing her undergraduate degree and beginning her master's degree at K-State. While assisting L. Susan Williams, K-State professor of sociology, with data entry from a Riley County Police Department Citizens Survey, Kendrick was struck by the answers to some of the survey's open-ended questions regarding crimes that were not fully addressed in the community.

"I noticed there were several answers about the serial rapist and the topic of rape," said Kendrick. "I found this interesting because there were no direct questions about rape or violence on the survey."

When she initially delved into the topic of the serial rapist, Kendrick knew she wanted to focus on how the crimes had affected the community, how women were getting their information on this subject and how their behavior changed in correlation to the information they received, and from what sources they received information.

She found that women get most of the information about the serial rapist from other women, but they would prefer to get information from official, legitimate news sources. Many of the women interviewed expressed frustration with the lack of information available to them.

(more)

"We have a very mobile population here and some of the freshmen I interviewed didn't even realize we had a serial rapist because he hadn't struck in almost two years," Kendrick said. "The women understand that the police department can only give so much information to the public when there is an ongoing investigation, but these women want more information — more often and more comprehensively from reliable sources."

Kendrick also found that the women discussed the serial rapist with friends relatively frequently, but the women in the study were less likely to talk about acquaintance rape. Kendrick found this troubling because statistically, a woman is more likely to be raped by an acquaintance than by a stranger.

"This is about women being taught to be afraid of strangers," she said. "Society teaches us to be afraid of the stranger in the bushes, but we rarely talk about those we date or see at parties. We rarely talk about the risks there."

Ironically, Kendrick submitted her final exam ballot for her master's degree on Aug. 7, the same day the serial rapist committed the most recent attack in Manhattan. Police are searching for a man they think has raped seven college-age women near K-State over the past seven years. They say the man always wears long-sleeve shirts and dark-colored gloves, and covers all but his eyes with a mask. Because of this mask, police don't have a composite sketch of the suspect and there are few leads. Even so, the attacker is described as a man 5 feet 10 inches tall and about 200 to 220 pounds.

Although investigators said the man tends to do and say the same things during the attacks, they haven't yet officially labeled him a "serial rapist." Kendrick wasn't sure why police were hesitant to officially label the attacker as a "serial rapist." She said it may have something to do with not wanting to create more fear in the community.

But, as Kendrick's research reveals, women in the community are already frightened.

Her real name isn't "Amy," but Kendrick said what she told her during an interview shows how the rapes are affecting some women.

Finding out about the existence of a serial rapist in the community "made me a little less outgoing," "Amy" told Kendrick. "I used to be very outgoing and would talk to anyone, and everyone was invited to my house for parties. But, after the rapist came around, I found myself not talking to men I didn't know and making sure that I knew whoever showed up at my house."

"For 'Amy' it changed who she was," Kendrick said. "She couldn't be who she was because of her fear. She felt she couldn't trust anyone or even her own feelings."

Kendrick hopes her research encourages the formal sources of information to be more proactive in terms of regularly updating the community on the investigation and providing safety tips for women.

"The concerns need to be for the women in the community who are afraid," Kendrick said. "They want to feel cared about. Informing the women about the serial rapist can help alleviate those fears and, at the same time, discuss acquaintance rape, which is much more likely to occur. When the formal sources talk about it, it gives the women permission to talk about it."

"Kristen's research represents some of our best work — well grounded, solid research that includes input from a population most affected by the phenomenon under study," said K-State's Williams. "We're very happy to showcase this thesis as an example of how sociology and criminology matters in our community."