

# Criminologist discusses gender, urban inequality among African Americans

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"Youths' descriptions fit quite closely to scholars' examinations of how structural inequalities negatively impact neighborhood residents and negatively impact the ability to generate social ties and protective networks necessary to combat crime," said Jody Miller, associate professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Miller presented a lecture about her book "Getting Played: African American Girls, Urban Inequality and Gendered Violence," which was released March 1. Miller's lecture focused on Chapter 2 in "Getting Played," entitled "Gender 'n the 'Hood: Neighborhood Violence Against Women and Girls."

The book's research methodology involved qualitative, in-depth interviews with 35 young women and 40 young men. The men and women were African American and lived in "distressed urban neighborhoods" in St. Louis.

The median age of those interviewed was 16, and the subjects were not selected at random sample, Miller said.

She also said her research did not intentionally include more young men interviewees than young women.

Miller read anecdotes from those who were interviewed. One young woman, Chesnay, described her neighborhood in the following quote: "Terrible. Every man for they self. Ghetto in the sense of raggedy, people uncool to people."

The book's title "Getting Played" came from disputes among youth about whether sexual and violent behavior toward women was harmful or "play," Miller said.

"Boys often used the terminology of 'play' to say that what they were doing was not serious - that it was humorous, that it was all in good fun," Miller said. "Girls were very ambivalent about what exactly to make of that."

Of the young women interviewed for "Getting Played," Miller said 54 percent reported some form of sexual victimization. Many of the young women interviewed used "respect yourself, protect yourself" strategies when they encountered violence in their urban neighborhoods, Miller said.

Other strategies they used included avoiding public places all the time or at

night; relying on the company of others for protection; and drawing security from neighborhood networks of family members and friends for protection, Miller said.

Miller also said limitations occur with these strategies, which include limitations on young women's participation in public and reliance on those who might be victimizers.

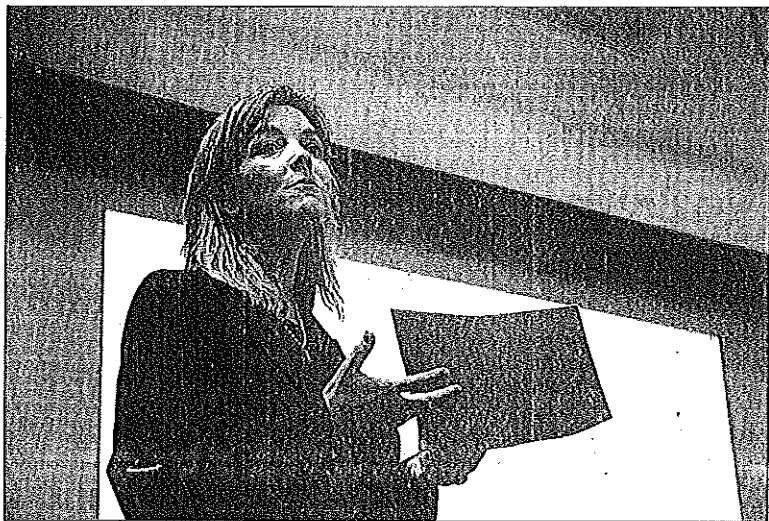
K-State's Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, the Women's Studies Program, the Dow Chemical Multicultural Resource Center and the Sociology Graduate Student Association sponsored Miller's lecture.

Michelle Bemiller, assistant professor of sociology, said she had her criminology class read Miller's 1998 article "Up It Up: Gender and the Accomplishment of Street Robbery" before Miller spoke with the class Thursday.

Miller's 2001 book "One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs and Gender" examined women as offenders.

As an important contributor to feminist criminology, Miller's research looks at women as victims of violence and as potential offenders, Bemiller said.

"I think, in general, it's



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Jody Miller, associate professor of criminology at the University of Missouri, St. Louis, gives a presentation on urban inequality and gender violence in the Little Theatre in the K-State Student Union Thursday afternoon.

safe to say girls and women were ignored for a very long time in criminology and seen only as victims and not offenders," Bemiller said.

Joe Grasela, senior in sociology, said he was already aware of several issues Miller addressed from his previ-

ous classes.

"However, it was really interesting to hear a qualitative interview process and getting to see the actual quotes of what people saw in their communities and neighborhoods," Grasela said. "We really need that more - what

people are seeing most of the time. I guess I didn't realize the level that gender plays in a neighborhood like that and how women are basically minimized and taught to deal with sexual violence and nothing which is done about it."