



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2011

### H19 Femmes Fatales: Why Do Women Dominate the Discipline of Forensic Anthropology?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to recognize the global phenomenon showing more women than men are actively engaged in forensic anthropology education and professional practice in the United Kingdom, United States, and Europe; and understand the reasons for this sweeping trend. It is especially obvious that more women than men are applying for and attending higher education courses in the United Kingdom and United States. It is anticipated that the attendees will have observed this trend in their own university courses, whether as tutors or students, and will have their own views on the phenomenon and explanations for it. This presentation will explore the different reasons for the trend, perhaps controversially. Attendees will gain insight into the determining factors that make more women choose to study forensic anthropology, remain in the discipline, and prosper with successful careers, as well as, discover if there are disincentives for men. It is hoped that this presentation will raise questions that will stimulate debate and make the attendees think about the nature of forensic anthropology education and practice.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing the reasons why more women enter university programs and become professional forensic anthropologists than men. It is undeniable that, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, undergraduate, and post-graduate programs are inundated with female applicants, and female students in courses outnumber male students in the order of at least 2:1, up to record numbers of even 25:1. This has tremendous implications for the future of forensic anthropology as a discipline, and for universities attempting to attract male, as well as, female students. Female-rich cohorts may positively or negatively influence selection criteria, numbers enrolled on part-time courses, completion rates, and the quality of learning. The high numbers of female professional forensic anthropologists may have positive or negative implications for career progression, deployment opportunities, membership of professional organizations, and acceptance by male-dominated institutions such as police and law enforcement agencies. Although the phenomenon has undoubtedly been noticed in the classrooms and laboratories of the United Kingdom and the United States, a systematic analysis of the reasons behind it has not been carried out to date, and it is vital in order to understand and prepare for the future of modern forensic anthropology.

This research aims to discover the cause of the undeniable, worldwide phenomenon that women dominate the global discipline of forensic anthropology today. There are more women than men training to be forensic anthropologists; in academic roles teaching forensic anthropology; and in professional forensic anthropology practice, in the United Kingdom, United States, and abroad, which begs the question "why"? This study is focused on establishing the various motivations for both men and women contemplating degrees and careers in forensic anthropology, and discusses their implications for the discipline.

Research questionnaires were circulated among male and female student and professional forensic anthropologists in the United Kingdom, United States, and Europe, in order to collate educational backgrounds and attitudes towards the subject and careers in the discipline. Admission and attendance statistics from United Kingdom, United States, and European universities and professional organizations were also gathered to amass data to chart the progression of the trend, the steady influx of women, and the decline of male students in undergraduate and postgraduate forensic anthropology courses since they began. Preliminary data has shown a steadily increasing majority of female applicants since the subject was offered as a university degree in the United Kingdom in 2002. Data from professional organizations in the United Kingdom and abroad was interrogated to determine whether applications from women outnumber those from men, and whether continued attendance and contribution has shown a gender bias over the last ten to fifteen years. In the handful of professional organizations for Biological and Forensic Anthropologists in the United Kingdom, for example, women outnumber men as many as 3:1.

The questionnaires pinpoint the factors that influence and encourage women to pursue a career in forensic anthropology, and to stay in it even if their life circumstances change. Preliminary results have offered some conflicting evidence, some of which suggests a career in forensic anthropology is flexible enough to accommodate raising a family, and some of which implies it may preclude it. It considers the attractions of the discipline to women, and whether these are different to those for men. The presentation explores this undeniable and extensive phenomenon, and investigates how long it has been occurring. It also discusses the motivation and impetus behind it. It will investigate the extent of the trend, and whether it exists only in forensic archaeology and anthropology, or whether it is true for forensic science as a whole, or indeed all the sciences in general.



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Preliminary questionnaire responses raise some important questions: is the popularity of television crime shows to blame/credit? What is it about forensic anthropology that appeals to women? Is forensic anthropology perceived as glamorous? Does forensic anthropology represent a flexible career for women with families? Is it

a recent phenomenon that reflects changing demographic distribution in most academic subjects? Is the trend to do with changing attitudes towards science, academic careers, women, or men, or all of the above? How long will it last? Already, there is a vast pool of opinion regarding these issues, which shows that although the trend is obvious, the reasons behind it are not, and/or they may be difficult to accept. Controversially, it will discuss whether women make better forensic anthropologists, or whether they are better suited to the subject for any reason, and whether men cannot compete in the workplace. Are men being put off the subject? Is there a stigma attached to the discipline for men? Do they feel at a disadvantage for any reason? Are they feeling 'crowded out' or unwelcome in any way? Are men put off by the sheer numbers of women in the discipline? And of course, does the dominance of women in the discipline matter at all?

The answers to these questions have considerable implications for the future of forensic anthropology in the United Kingdom and abroad, in terms of education marketing, compliance with Equal Opportunities legislation and the composition of professional organizations and the practitioner workforce. This research aims to answer these questions and more, and to determine the true nature of the apparent complete dominance of the discipline that has emerged in the last ten to fifteen years, and above all, it aims to stimulate debate amongst male and female, student and professional, forensic anthropologists, and "get to the bottom" of this important and remarkable phenomenon.

**Forensic Anthropology, Women, Education**