



## Physical Anthropology Section - 2012

### H22 Further Femmes Fatales: Do Women Dominate Forensic Anthropology Professional Practice in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom?

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain awareness of the phenomenon that women outnumber men in forensic anthropology professional practice. It is anticipated that many attendees will have seen last year's presentation on this trend in the United Kingdom, and therefore will obtain more in-depth appreciation into whether this trend is reflected in the United States and Canada. Attendees will be able to compare gender distribution, motivations, career pathways and career progression in North America versus the United Kingdom.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting additional research that extends the investigation into professional practice and competence, allowing an overview of the uneven gender distribution that exists today. The composition of the forensic anthropology community has implications for deployment opportunities around the world, career progression, and acceptance of the discipline by male-dominated institutions such as police and law enforcement agencies.

This research extends that presented at the 2011 AAFS conference (Williams),<sup>1</sup> which examined the fact that more consistently women than men enroll in forensic anthropology university courses in the United Kingdom. The present study aims to determine whether this trend in education is reflected in professional practice and membership of professional forensic anthropology-related associations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, and to elucidate reasons for this trend.

Gender distribution statistics for forensic anthropology professionals were gathered via two mechanisms. Member details from the main professional Forensic Anthropology associations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom for the last decade were collated, including the Physical Anthropology Section of the AAFS, the Forensic Anthropology section of the International Association for Identification (IAI), the British Association of Forensic Anthropologists (BAFA) and others. Questionnaires were also circulated to Forensic Anthropologists employed at leading universities, forensic laboratories, museums, and professional institutions, in order to determine the gender distribution of professionals, and to record their motivations for entering the discipline, career ascent and pathways, and persistence in career.

Preliminary results suggest that greater numbers of women than ever before are applying for forensic anthropology professional positions and membership to professional associations. Female membership of the AAFS Physical Anthropology section has risen by 11% over the last 10 years. However, the apparent saturation of women at lower levels is not translated vertically, and the distribution of women in the higher echelons of the discipline has not yet reached equilibrium with men. The number of female Diplomates of the ABFA has risen to 35%, and has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years, a trend which is projected to continue, but this is not representative of the distribution of women throughout the educational system. This research aims to raise questions as well as answer them, and to determine why there is this saturation at lower levels, without equality of progression. Is it simply a matter of time? Are female forensic anthropologists reluctant to apply for more senior positions, or are men better at securing the more senior positions? Is the discipline still dominated by men from the early growth years of the discipline? Are the competency tests giving equal opportunity to both genders?

This research is the first trans-Atlantic study to examine the apparently global profusion of women in forensic anthropology, and to elucidate reasons for the lack of gender parity at all levels of the discipline. This has important implications for the future of professional practice, membership of professional organizations, and higher education in the discipline.

#### Reference:

1. Williams A. Femmes fatales: why do women dominate forensic anthropology education and professional practice in the UK? Proceedings of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences; 21-25 February 2011, Chicago, IL.

#### Forensic Anthropology, Professional Practice, Gender