



E26 The Transgender Consideration: The Importance of Reassessing Unidentified Human Skeletal Remains to Provide New Investigative Directions

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand: (1) challenges associated with investigating the death of an individual whose biological gender was originally incorrectly determined; (2) investigative detours that will take the attendees to new places and introduce them to new communities; and, (3) that it is imperative to pre-examine unidentified decedent cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating the importance of unidentified decedent case reassessment and how inaccurate information can impact the direction of an entire investigation 25 years later.

This presentation reviews an unusual case study that illustrates the importance of revisiting scientific and investigative methods that were used in attempts to identify unidentified decedents from many years ago. As technology advances, so does subculture awareness, access, and acceptance.

In 1988, decomposing and partially skeletonized human remains were found in a wooded area in south Lake County, FL. Based on the decedent's hair, clothing, autopsy results, and anthropological studies, the body was identified as that of a Caucasian female. Additional information was provided that this woman most likely had one or more children. A thorough investigation was completed by law enforcement, but the decedent was never identified. The cause and manner of death were certified as "Undetermined." Throughout the following years, this decedent's information was disseminated through different websites that specialize in aiding with identification.

As part of an initiative of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearing House and the Florida Medical Examiner's Commission, the District 5 medical examiner began re-evaluating unidentified human skeletal remains cases that had been in storage, some dating back to the 1970s. Although the majority of these remains had already been examined by an anthropologist, it was determined that a subsequent examination, along with the extraction of samples for DNA testing, could further assist with identification.

In 2013, the District 5 Medical Examiner's Office was notified by the C.A. Pound Human Identification Laboratory that a second anthropological examination revealed that the aforementioned decedent was not a female as previously thought, but a male. This determination was confirmed through DNA analysis. It was further believed that the decedent was, at some point, receiving estrogen and relaxin, which resulted in changes that exhibited bone resorption. This bone resorption is often associated with childbirth but is also found in pre- and post-operative transgender people. The results of the second anthropological analysis, in addition to the DNA confirmation of gender, redirected the entire investigation. The focus of the investigation shifted from a local, rural community to the closest metropolitan areas that supported a transgender community.

Anthropology, Forensic Investigation, Transgender