



A146 Why Are There So Many Women in Forensic Anthropology? A Critical Evaluation of Gender Politics in Forensic Anthropology

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the current position women hold in the field of forensic anthropology in terms of student enrollment, professional positions, organizational membership status, and leadership roles. Additionally, sexual harassment and discrimination within the discipline are addressed.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing needed information on a long-going discussion within forensic anthropology as to the number of women in the discipline, primarily in comparison to men. It will further outline issues surrounding sexual harassment and discrimination and provide suggestions for a path forward.

While attention is constantly drawn to the number of women currently pursuing and practicing forensic anthropology, there is little data to investigate the relative changes over time in the gender of individuals in the discipline. Passalacqua and Pilloud recently addressed this issue and showed that females greatly outnumber males in membership within the Anthropology section of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), particularly in the student and trainee affiliate categories.¹ Further, Passalacqua and Pilloud demonstrated that men have traditionally outnumbered women in disciplinary leadership positions (e.g., section chair, Diplomates of the American Board of Forensic Anthropology, and recipients of the T. Dale Stewart award), although there is a shifting trend over the past decade to favor more women in these positions.¹

To further explore gender differences, grant funding and tenure-track positions in forensic anthropology were evaluated. Grant funding was assessed using the National Institute of Justice list of graduate research fellowships since 2000. Among those with forensic anthropology as a focus of research, eight fellowships were awarded to women and six to men. This number is surprisingly comparable despite the larger number of female student affiliates in the AAFS anthropology section. Further, men were on average awarded more money than were women. The number of tenure-track faculty positions for forensic anthropologists were evaluated at PhD-granting universities. As programs have grown and faculty have retired, there has been a shift toward more women in these positions that were previously held by men.

While trends are moving toward more inclusion of women in forensic anthropology, there is still a pervasive gender bias and work to be done in combating sexual discrimination. Such biases have been well documented in the sciences in the: peer review process, election to leadership roles, awarding of research and career grants, and hiring and promotion. In addition to pervasive sexism hindering progress in their careers, women may also be subjected to sexual harassment. Such harassment can occur in places of employment, during fieldwork, in the classroom, or at professional conferences.²⁻⁴

Despite the growing number of women forensic anthropologists, it still may be difficult for them to achieve leadership positions or gain respect from male colleagues. In the face of such challenges, women may be more likely to leave the discipline or to seek positions with more flexibility, less authority and responsibility, and lower salary. Further, the question itself, “Why are there so many women in forensic anthropology,” reinforces these gendered stereotypes by putting the onus on women to explain why they are drawn to forensic anthropology, with the assumption that they should not be.

To improve gender equality and overall diversity within the discipline, there needs to a shift in how this problem is addressed, with a focus on retention and promotion of women within the discipline. Solutions could include making workplace accommodations such as: flexible hours, workplace sexual harassment and discrimination training, transparency on equal wages, and clear policies and repercussions for sexual harassment and discrimination. Within the discipline, there should be a move to double-blind peer reviews, and professional organizations could provide outlets for women to gain additional mentoring as they navigate their careers. Finally, professional organizations must take a strong and clear stance against sexual discrimination and harassment that is well articulated and contains clear consequences for violations. Through such a concerted effort, forensic anthropology is poised to serve as an example for biological anthropology and the forensic sciences in promoting gender equality.

Reference(s):

1. Passalacqua N.V., Pilloud M.A. *Ethics and Professionalism in Forensic Anthropology*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2018.
2. Shen H. Scientific Groups Revisit Sexual-Harassment Policies. *Nature News*. 2015;16 November(doi:10.1038/nature.2015.18790).
3. Clancy K.B.H., Nelson R.G., Rutherford J.N., Hinde K. Survey of Academic Field Experiences (SAFE): Trainees Report Harassment and Assault. *PLoS One*. 2014;9(7):e102172.
4. Nelson R.G., Rutherford J.N., Hinde K., Clancy K.B.H. Signaling Safety: Characterizing Fieldwork Experiences and Their Implications for Career Trajectories. *Amer Anthropol*. 2017;DOI:10.1111/aman.12929.

Gender Equality, Sexual Discrimination, Sexual Harassment