

Researchers explore forensic anthropology's current knowledge with transgender bodies

22 March 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

While transgender and gender-diverse individuals have historically been disproportionately susceptible to violence and homicides, the recent rise in visibility of ongoing trans-focused violence has highlighted how the medical-legal community, in general and forensic anthropology, in particular, have largely neglected trans and gender-diverse people.

This is exemplified by a new study that found nearly 30 percent of forensic anthropologists surveyed had participated in a case involving a transgender individual, yet the vast majority (75 percent) were unfamiliar with gender-affirming surgeries.

"Because [medical interventions](#) to treat the distress associated with [gender dysphoria](#) have the potential to indirectly or directly impact skeletal structures, it is important for forensic anthropologists to be familiar with these alterations," explained corresponding author Sean

Tallman, Ph.D., RPA, assistant professor of anatomy & neurobiology at Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM).

According to the researchers the existence of transgender and gender-diverse individuals challenges the traditional sex estimation procedures that have been highly ingrained in forensic anthropological teaching, research and practice, as these individuals may not, anatomically speaking, fall squarely into preexisting sex categories.

"It is critical that forensic anthropologists use the appropriate sex in forensic anthropological casework to ensure that decedents' humanity and self-identity are upheld. However, this requires that [forensic anthropologists](#) recognize potential signs of gender-affirming surgeries, though most practitioners are unfamiliar with surgical manifestations, and the vast majority of transgender individuals do not undergo surgical procedures."

The researcher believe moving forward, it is crucial that the field gains a comprehensive understanding of [transgender](#) bodies and how to recognize and document the changes, in addition to understanding how gender affirmation procedures impact the biological profile and subsequent identifications. "Therefore, we advocate for a bio-cultural and queer theoretical perspective in forensic sex estimation and in sexual dimorphism research, which allows for the field to challenge heteronormative assumptions, question typological two-sex categorization and combat the presumptions that gender and sex are stable entities that convey universal meaning," added Tallman.

More information: Sean Tallman et al. Centering

Transgender Individuals in Forensic Anthropology
and Expanding Binary Sex Estimation in Casework
and Research. *Forensic Anthropology*
doi.org/10.5744/fa.2020.0030

Provided by Boston University School of Medicine
APA citation: Researchers explore forensic anthropology's current knowledge with transgender
bodies (2021, March 22) retrieved 23 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-explore-forensic-anthropology-current-knowledge.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.