

# The Changing Landscape of Archaeology

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## Abstract

For over a decade and a half the book *The American Archaeologists: A Profile*<sup>1</sup> has stood as the defining source on North American archaeologists. Unfortunately this source of information is but a snap shot in time and the reliance on this source overlooks all the changes that have occurred in the last 16 years. This paper demonstrates this problem by examining the gender ratios of female and male archaeologists. The results show that a shift has occurred in the younger generations of archaeologists, from a slight imbalance in favour of males to a fairly large imbalance in favour of females. This paper concludes by making the argument for additional research in the field of archaeology that recognises the evolutions that are occurring.

## Introduction

It will be demonstrated by this brief paper that transformations could be occurring that would fundamentally alter what we think about archaeology and the North American Archaeologist. It will show that new research should be initiated soon to get a accurate picture of North American Archaeologists. These Aims will be accomplished by taking data and conclusions drawn about gender equality from the 1997 book *The American Archaeologists: A Profile* and comparing it against recent data. In the process showing that updated data is needed on archaeologists as the current information is inaccurate.

## Surveying Archaeologists

In North America, the last three decades have seen numerous attempts to understand the public and their interest in archaeology.<sup>2</sup> As archaeologists began to investigate

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<sup>1</sup> Zeder, M. (1997) *The American Archaeologist: A Profile*, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, California.

<sup>2</sup> Feder, K.L (1984) 'Irrationality and Popular Archaeology', *American Antiquity*, Vol. 49, pp. 525-541; Feder, K. L (1995) 'Ten Years After: Surveying Misconceptions About the Human Past', *CRM: Cultural Resources Management*, Vol. 18, Issue 3, pp. 10-14; Feder, K. L. (1998) 'Perceptions of the Past: Survey Results - How Students Perceive the Past', *General Anthropology*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 8-12; MORI (2000) *Attitudes Towards the Heritage. Research Study Conducted for English Heritage*, July 2000, English Heritage, London; Pokotylo, D. (2002) 'Public Opinion and Canadian Archaeological Heritage: A National Perspective' *Canadian Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 26, pp. 88-129; Pokotylo, D. & A. Mason (1991) 'Public Attitudes towards Archaeological Resources and their Management' in Smith, G. S. and Ehrenhard, J. E. (eds.) *Protecting the Past*, CRC Press, Boca Raton, pp. 9-18; Pokotylo, D. & Guppy, N. (1999) 'Public Opinion and Archaeological Heritage: Views From Outside the Profession', *American Antiquity*, Vol. 64, Issue 3, pp. 400-416; Ramos, M. and Duganne, D. for the Society for American Archaeology (2000) *Exploring Public*

the public, and their perceptions, they also started to wonder about themselves and how little was known about archaeologists. This curiosity led to a flurry of activity in the late 1980s and 1990s in which archaeologists began to investigate themselves.<sup>3</sup> Most notable of these studies was the Society of American Archaeologists' (SAA) society-wide examination in the 1990s.

The SAA survey was the result of many different interests coming together. From those concerned with gender equality to those wondering about the shifts in employment, from academic to Cultural Resource Management, archaeologists had many unanswered questions. Pressure to answer these questions built up until 1994, when the SAA launched a survey of archaeologists. Seventeen-hundred archaeologists responded for the largest survey of archaeologists ever. The results of which became the 1997 book *The American Archaeologists: A Profile* which covered many aspects of archaeologists discovered in the survey. It has been sixteen years since this survey and this work has still stayed the definitive source on North American archaeologists and the situation of the field.

The reason that this is the definitive source on American archaeologists is because in sixteen years no other investigation, of that scale, has been undertaken in North America. A minor survey has occurred with regards to salary<sup>4</sup> and there have been major studies in other countries such as Britain<sup>5</sup> and Australia,<sup>6</sup> but nothing on the same scale in North America during that time. Archaeologists have been included in wider surveys of Anthropology<sup>7</sup> as they are usually considered a subset of anthropology in North America. The problem with anthropology surveys are that they include all anthropologists and as such the percentage of archaeologists who participate are low. A low response rate makes it hard to gauge if these studies are representative of archaeologists as a whole. In short, work of this type has gone on, just not with North American archaeologists.

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*Perceptions and Attitudes about Archaeology*. [Online]. February 2010. Available from: <http://www.saa.org/Portals/0/SAA/pubedu/nrptdraft4.pdf>. [Accessed: 8th September 2010] and Soren, B. (1995) 'Observing the Present - Reflecting the Past. Attitudes Towards Archaeology in the United Arab Emirates', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*, Vol. 6, Issue 2, pp. 116–128.

<sup>3</sup> Claassen, C. (ed.) (1994) *Women in Archaeology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia; Evans, J.J. (1988) *Management Study of the Short Range and Long Range Needs for Organization and Operation: A Report for the Society for American Archaeologists*, Fairbanks Associates, Alamo California; Lees, W.B. (1991) *Results of the Membership Survey*, Society for Professional Archaeologists and Zimmer, J., Wilk, R., & Pyburn, A. (1995) 'A Survey of Attitudes and Values in Archaeological Practice', *SAA Bulletin*, Vol. 13, Issue 5.

<sup>4</sup> Association Research Inc. (2005) *2005 Salary Survey conducted for Society for American Archaeologists and Society for Historical Archaeology*, Society for American Archaeologists.

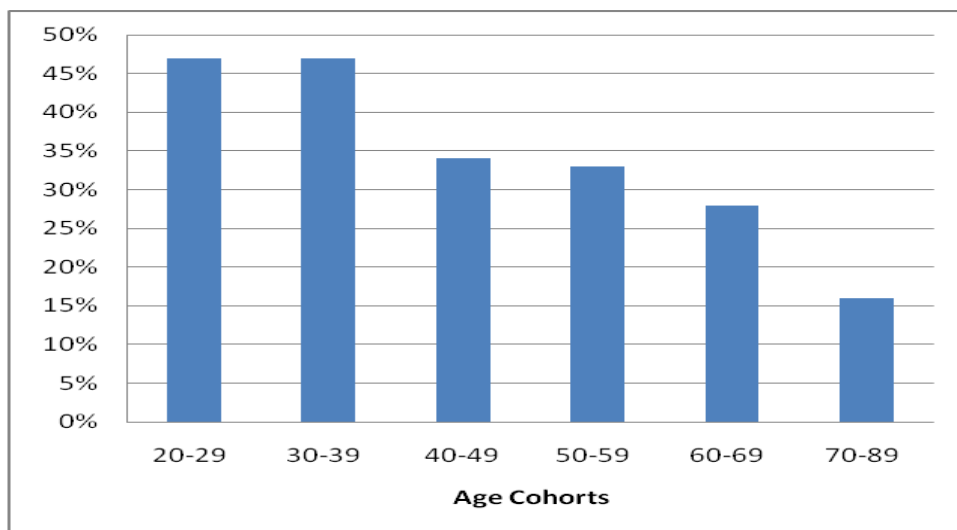
<sup>5</sup> Aitchison, K. & Edwards, R. (2003) *Archaeology Labour Market Intelligence: Profiling the Profession 2002/03*, Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation and the Institute of Field Archaeologists, Bradford.

<sup>6</sup> Ulm, S., Nichols, S. & Dalley, C. (2005) 'Mapping the shape of contemporary Australian archaeology: Implications for archaeology teaching and learning', *Australian Archaeology*, Vol. 61, pp. 11-23.

<sup>7</sup> Brondo, K., Bennett, L., Farmer, H., Martin, C. & Mrkva, A. (2009) *Work Climate, Gender, and the Status of Practicing Anthropologists*. [Online]. February 2009. Available from: <http://www.aaanet.org/resources/departments/upload/COSWA-REPORT-ON-PRACTICING-ANTHROPOLOGY-2.pdf> [Accessed: 8th September 2010] and Rudd, E., Morrison, R. E., Picciano, J., & Nerad, M. (2008) *Social Science PhDs Five+ Years Out: Anthropology Report*. [Online]. February 2008. Available from: <http://www.aaanet.org/resources/departments/upload/SS5-Anthropology-Report-2.pdf>. [Accessed: 8th September 2010].

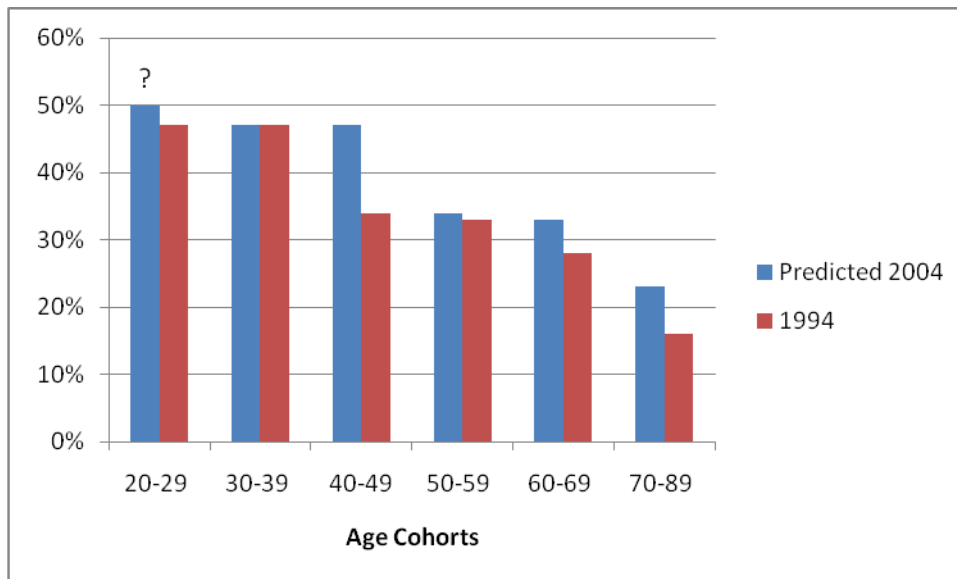
The problem with this lack of ongoing research is that the results from a survey, like the SAA survey, are static. They are snapshots in time and are only valid for the moment in time when they were taken. Year to year only slight alterations will occur and so it is safe to use these results for a few years. The problem is that these changes can be cumulative and over several years the conditions measured can transform noticeably, sometimes drastically. Without taking a new survey there is no way to compare results and see if changes are occurring or not.

To demonstrate the pitfalls of static information and the value of regular (at least every ten years) investigations this paper will examine one of the findings from the SAA survey, the gender break down of archaeologists by age (Figure 1). The study found that there was an uneven ratio of male to female archaeologists in the older generations. Most archaeologists over the age of 40 are male and this ratio only gets more uneven the older the archaeologists. Zeder drew the conclusion, from this data, and other data, that women were dropping out of archaeology before 40 because of pressures such as raising children. A reasonable conclusion from the data on hand but Zeder also states that a survey would be needed in ten years to see if this trend continues or changes.



**Figure 1:** Percentage of women archaeologists by age group in 1994. Based on data from Zeder (1997)

Another possibility that this paper will propose is that the results seen are a generation difference. That for an unknown reason the generation of archaeologists under 40 years of age are more gender equal. As the older generation age and retire they will be replaced by the younger more gender equal generation of archaeologists. This push up should be seen with every subsequent age bracket (Figure 2) and within a decade close to equal gender ratio for most archaeologists under the age of 50 should be observed.



**Figure 2:** Prediction of demographic shift. Numbers rounded to the nearest whole number. The 20-29 group is assumed equal gender ratios.

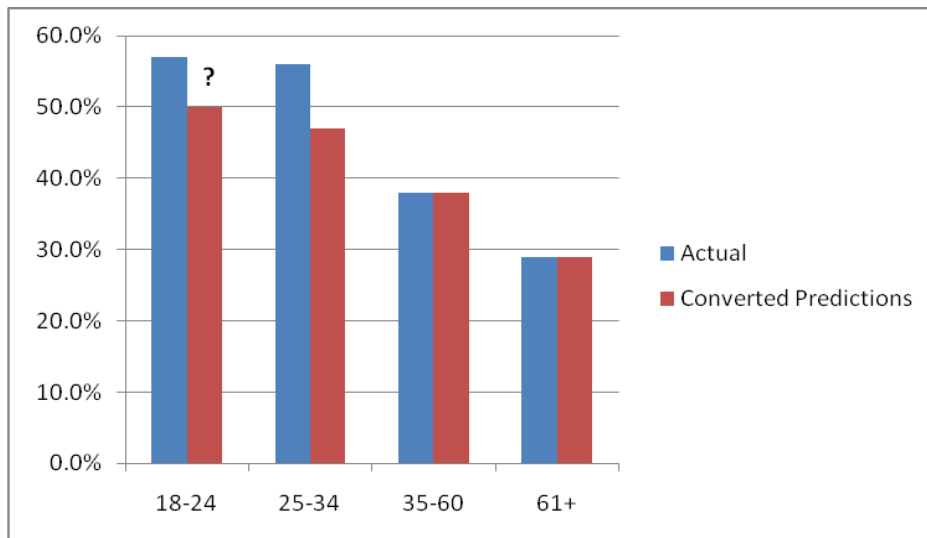
### Data

To test this assumption demographic data was used from a survey conducted in 2008 about the perceptions of archaeologists on public outreach and education. The survey sample was limited to archaeologists in New Mexico so there is a chance of some regional bias in the data but that will be discussed below. Out of an estimated 532 archaeologists in New Mexico<sup>8</sup> and an unknown percent of 293 anthropology students (124 graduate students, 169 undergraduate),<sup>9</sup> 208 responses were received of which 165 were completed fully. The professional archaeologists' completion rate was 26.5%, a comparable response rate to the SAA survey.

The age groupings are not the same for the data from the New Mexico survey because the survey was designed for different results. The SAA survey broke down age by 10 year intervals but the comparative data used is broken down by 18-24, 25-34, 35-60, and 61+. The data from Figure 2 was converted to the new age brackets which was not perfect. Half of the 40-49 should have been counted in the 61+ age group but it was not and included in the 36-60 age range. Not knowing the exact age of all the participants it was decided to keep the groups intact. Including half of the 40-49 age group in the 61+ could have raised the average slightly but it would have still been within a few percentage points of the predicted value. The results of this can be seen in Figure 3.

<sup>8</sup> Sebastian, L. (2005) *Deer in the Woods. Count of Archaeologist in New Mexico*, Personal Communication.

<sup>9</sup> American Association of Anthropologists (eds.) (2008) *AAA Guide*, American Association of Anthropologists, Washington D.C.



**Figure 3:** New Mexico survey data vs. the predicted values from the SAA survey. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number. The converted values are unknown for the 18-24 and 25-34 but estimated at 50% and 47% respectively.

### Discussion

The comparisons are not perfect but it is possible to see the results accrued as predicted by this paper. It appears that the younger generations of archaeologists are replacing their older peers. On the other hand the issue of gender equality, while changing, has not gone away. There is now a reversed gender ratio with close to 60% of younger archaeologists female. A gender bias in younger archaeologists against males is now present in North American archaeology.

While the assumption that gender ratio was a demographic trend turned out to be correct this is in no way a criticism of Zeder’s conclusion. It was valid conclusion with the data available at that time. Moreover, this stands as an example of what this paper is trying to highlight, there needs to be more research as the old data is static. As put forth at the beginning of this paper there are disadvantages to static data especially when dealing with fluid aspects such as demographics or opinions.

These results could be the reflection of some bias in New Mexican archaeologists. Without further testing such as a national survey, there is no way to determine if this data reflects a wider continental pattern or local. This uncertainty is even more reason for archaeologists to start to consider launching another wide ranging survey of archaeologists. Results, such as these, from a geographically limited area should not stand but be retested to confirm the gender trends observed.

Results of another larger survey could be surprising as seen here with a reversal in uneven gender ratios in younger archaeologists. As the SAA covered a wide range of subjects from gender equality to the theoretical leanings of archaeologists there is a wealth of possible aspects to investigate. Sixteen years is just too long between surveys and while some of the trends observed in the 1994 survey have probably not changed there is no way to know this without further investigation. Hopefully another 16 years does not go by again before this important work is carried out.

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