

I'VE GOT 99 FORENSIC PROBLEMS FROM PUBLIC PERCEPTION: SECONDARY TRANSFER, GENEALOGY, RAPID DNA, DNA MIXTURES AND MORE

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The first decade in the 2000's had forensic scientists grappling with the alleged CSI effect. The flagship show ended in 2015 but public perception of forensic science is not free of scrutiny as a result of television, article titles and splashy cases. Ripped from the headlines; "Framed for Murder by His Own DNA", "Most Crime Labs Accused Innocent Person in DNA Mixture Study", "The Troubling Rise of Rapid DNA Testing" and "Forensic Genealogists Shake Family Trees to Find Criminals". According to a New York Times article in 2016 citing Nielsen, the typical American was up to a whopping average of 5 hours and 4 minutes of television viewing per day. Compound that shocking statistic, with the nearly 24 hours a week spent online as reported by USC Anneberg, and you have the average American exposed to some form of electronic media approximately 59 hours a week. This number doesn't even factor in newspapers, magazines, books and idle talk. Furthermore, the word of mouth in the forensic community can further muddy the waters of what is presented to the world via cross examination horror stories, personal experiences and training programs or lack thereof. As a Forensic DNA Analyst in 2019, how do we set the record straight in the media, as an expert witness in the courtroom and to victim advocates contacting us to see if we heard about some box that gives DNA results in two hours? In this talk we'll examine the individual professional responsibility in the field of forensic DNA from media and publishing to the courtroom. Additionally, the importance of properly training students, staff and stake holders with an accurate representation of the limitations and strengths of forensic science evidence will be discussed.