

Your Teeth Tell a Tale

surely as fingerprints, and they reveal many other things about you, too.

BY GEORG MANN

THE ACCUSED burglar smiled confidently in the Kansas City court. The evidence linking him with the raid on the grocery store was trivial—three bite marks in a piece of cheese!

Then the dental expert began testifying, pointing out in detail the resemblance between the teeth of the accused and the marks left in the cheese.

There were similar deviations in the bite—the way the teeth in the upper and lower jaw met. There was a similar defect in one of the sharp-pointed canine teeth at the front corner of the mouth. And the marks left in the cheese showed that the thief had two upper front teeth pulled and replaced, but the replacements were damaged and never repaired. The accused man's teeth matched exactly.

The dental expert said the chances of any other individual leaving identical bite marks in the cheese were 60 million to one! The prisoner's smile vanished as the jury brought in a quick verdict of guilty.

This case recently was cited by Dr. Albert Dahlberg of the University of Chicago Dental Clinic as proof that teeth provide a conclusive means of identifying individuals. In fact, Dr. Dahlberg believes that identification through the teeth is second only to fingerprints.

You may have noticed that when your dentist fills your teeth, he marks the fillings on a chart. Such records have proved to be invaluable, pinpointing every filling and missing tooth in the mouths of thousands of patients.

The pattern of your teeth is unique. One telltale feature is the angle at which each tooth is turned in the gums. The angles may be slight, but they are measurable. Equally identifiable is the shape of the individual teeth.

Some of these tooth patterns result from heredity. If you have a small jaw with large teeth, or vice versa, chances are you can blame your ancestors. Crowded teeth

are often inherited, too; so are conditions in which the tooth enamel is greatly overgrown. Some families tend to inherit dental patterns in which certain teeth may be entirely missing, typically the third molars, or those on either side of the upper front teeth.

Your life experience also marks your teeth, giving clues to the dental detectives. Certain diseases or other environmental conditions can prevent your teeth from developing normally. Many childhood diseases, striking while the teeth are growing, can result in easily detected changes.

Even your job may be reflected in your teeth. Carpenters, for example, tend to bite nails, which leave permanent marks in their teeth.

Chronic pipe smokers show special patterns of tooth wear. Scientists, checking skulls of men dead for a thousand years, have not only been able to establish that these people used toothpicks, but even determined whether they were right- or left-handed, judging by the telltale marks on their teeth!

Close observation has solved some dental mysteries. A few years back, Dr. Walter Cogswell of Colorado Springs, Colo., suddenly discovered why the front teeth of many of his younger women patients were notched: they were using their front teeth to open bobby pins. The pins, being saw-toothed, produced grooves in the teeth!

There's another identification suggested a few years ago by Dr. Gosta Gustafson of Sweden. He pointed out that tooth enamel grows in regular bands, just like tree rings. These bands differ with individuals, and so provide sound basis for determining a person's age.

Your teeth contain many clues to who you are, so if you want to commit a perfect crime, keep your mouth shut. Your teeth can betray you as readily and as surely as your fingertips!

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