

# How chewing gum or a shed hair can let strangers read your 'Book of Life'

June 26 2013

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Someone finds that piece of chewing gum you pitched today, uses the saliva to sequence your DNA and surreptitiously reads your book of life—including genetic secrets like your susceptibility to diseases. If that scenario, posed in an article in the current edition of *Chemical & Engineering News*, causes a little discomfort, consider this: That stranger also uses the DNA to reconstruct a copy of y-o-u.

Linda Wang, a senior editor of C&EN, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, the world's largest scientific society, focuses on an unusual art exhibition that raises those and other unsettling questions. The exhibit, "[Stranger Visions](#)," contains the work of Heather Dewey-Hagborg, a Ph.D. candidate in electronic arts at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Wang explains that at a time of concern and debate about the privacy of email and other personal communications, Dewey-Hagborg raises some of what may be the ultimate personal privacy issues. Dewey-Hagborg actually used genetic analysis and three-dimensional printing technology to produce facial sculptures of anonymous strangers. She collected their DNA from [chewing gum](#), cigarette butts, strands of hair and other items that people have left behind in subways, bathrooms and other public places around New York City.

**More information:** "Guarding Our DNA"  
[cen.acs.org/articles/91/i25/Guarding-DNA.html](http://cen.acs.org/articles/91/i25/Guarding-DNA.html)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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