

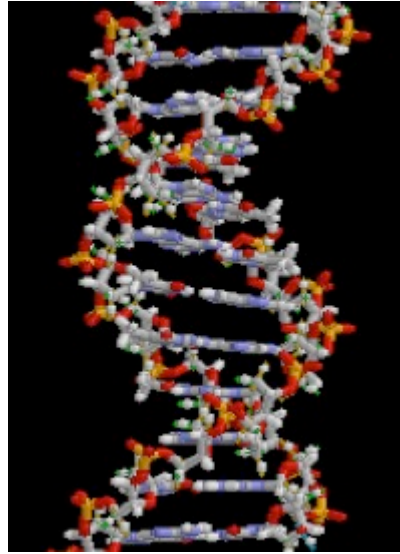


Written by [James Heiser](#) on August 19, 2009

Study Shows DNA Evidence Can Be Faked

In recent years, a popular understanding has arisen that DNA is an infallible form of evidence; whether one is speaking of a crime scene or a paternity test, whether on the news or in a crime drama, "The genes don't lie." But now a new study has found that DNA can be as open to falsification as any other form of evidence.

According to [a report in the New York Times](#), a paper published in *Forensic Science International: Genetics* claims, "The scientists fabricated blood and saliva samples containing DNA from a person other than the donor of the blood and saliva. They also showed that if they had access to a DNA profile in a database, they could construct a sample of DNA to match that profile without obtaining any tissue from that person." According to Dan Frumkin, lead author of the published study: "You can just engineer a crime scene.... Any biology undergraduate could perform this" — a revelation that raises the obvious concern that someone may indeed have performed such genetic forgery already.



The *New York Times* article quotes John M. Butler of the National Institute of Standards and Technology as saying that although he was "impressed" by the results of the study, he added, "I think your average criminal wouldn't be able to do something like that." However, according to [the UK Telegraph](#), "The process was so successful that it fooled forensic scientists who carry out DNA fingerprinting for American courts." Thus, not only does the new study raise concerns regarding future crimes, it opens numerous convictions on the basis of genetic evidence to being reexamined on appeal.

The alarming possibility is that the capacity for such genetic misdirection, even if it is beyond the capacity of "average criminals," could be possible for organized crime and could become a means of legal entrapment, or be used as one more tool in the hands of authoritarian regimes to persecute leading opponents. Access to a DNA profile makes the whole genetic forgery process possible and raises new concerns about any healthcare system that would place the medical records of the general public in the hands of the government.

As if this were not enough bad news, press reports also note that the technologies utilized for the study allow the retrieval of anyone's DNA from such common items as drinking cups, eating utensils, or cigarette butts, allowing for genetic profiling on the basis of such readily obtained samples.

In 1997, the movie *Gattaca* presented viewers with a world in which a strand of hair or a flake of skin



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could be used by employers for purposes of job discrimination, and innocent men could be framed with a crime; it presented a world in which no one looked at the person any more, only the DNA markers. The paper published in *Forensic Science International* is further evidence of how frighteningly near such a world may now be to becoming reality.



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