Jeffrey MacDonald: Fatal Vision

The grisly murder scene that confronted police on February 17, 1970, is one that cannot be wiped from memory. Summoned to the Fort Bragg residence of Captain Jeffrey MacDonald, a physician, police found the bludgeoned body of MacDonald's wife. She had been repeatedly knifed and her face was smashed to a pulp. MacDonald's two children, ages 2 and 5, had been brutally and repeatedly knifed and battered to death.

Suspicion quickly fell on MacDonald. To the eyes of investigators, the murder scene had a staged appearance. MacDonald described a frantic effort to subdue four intruders who had slashed at him with an ice pick. However, the confrontation left MacDonald with minor wounds and no apparent defensive wounds on his arms. MacDonald then described how he had covered his slashed wife with his blue pajama top. Interestingly, when the body was removed, blue threads were observed under the body. In fact, blue threads matching the pajama top turned up throughout the house—nineteen in one child's bedroom, including one beneath her fingernail, and two in the other child's bedroom. Eighty-one blue fibers were recovered from the master bedroom, and two were located on a bloodstained piece of wood outside the house.

Later forensic examination showed that the forty-eight ice pick holes in the pajama top were smooth and cylindrical, a sign that the top was stationary when it was slashed. Also, folding the pajama top demonstrated that the forty-eight holes actually could have been made by twenty-one thrusts of an ice pick. This coincided with the number of wounds that MacDonald's wife sustained. As described in the book *Fatal Vision*, which chronicled the murder investigation, when MacDonald was confronted with adulterous conduct, he replied, "You guys are more thorough than I thought." MacDonald is currently serving three consecutive life sentences.

chapter 10

Trace Evidence I

Hairs and Fibers

Key Terms

anagen phase
catagen phase
cortex
cuticle
follicular tag
macromolecule
manufactured fibers
medulla
mitochondrial DNA
molecule
monomer
natural fibers
nuclear DNA
polymer
telogen phase

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Recognize and understand the cuticle, cortex, and medulla areas of hair
- List the three phases of hair growth
- Appreciate the distinction between animal and human hairs
- List hair features that are useful for microscopic comparison of human hairs
- Explain proper collection of forensic hair evidence
- Describe and understand the role of DNA typing in hair comparisons
- Understand the differences between natural and manufactured fibers
- List the properties of fibers that are most useful for forensic comparisons
- Describe proper collection of fiber evidence

The trace evidence transferred between individuals and objects during the commission of a crime, if recovered, often corroborates other evidence developed during the course of an investigation. Although in most cases physical evidence cannot by itself positively identify a suspect, laboratory examination may narrow the origin of such evidence to a group that includes the suspect. Using many of the instruments and techniques we have already examined, the crime laboratory has developed a variety of procedures for comparing and tracing the origins of physical evidence. This and the forthcoming chapters discuss how to apply these techniques to the analysis of the types of physical evidence most often encountered at crime scenes. We begin with a discussion of hairs and fibers.

Forensic Examination of Hair

Hair is encountered as physical evidence in a wide variety of crimes. However, any review of the forensic aspects of hair examination must start with the observation that it is not yet possible to individualize a human hair to any single head or body through its morphology, or structural characteristics. Over the years, criminalists have tried to isolate the physical and chemical properties of hair that could serve as individual characteristics of identity. Partial success has finally been achieved by isolating and characterizing the DNA present in hair.

The importance of hair as physical evidence cannot be overemphasized. Its removal from the body often denotes physical contact between a victim and perpetrator and hence a crime of a serious or violent nature. When hair is properly collected at the crime scene and submitted to the laboratory along with enough standard/reference samples, it can provide strong corroborative evidence for placing an individual at a crime site. The first step in the forensic examination of hair logically starts with its color and structure, or morphology, and, if warranted, progresses to the more detailed DNA extraction, isolation, and characterization.

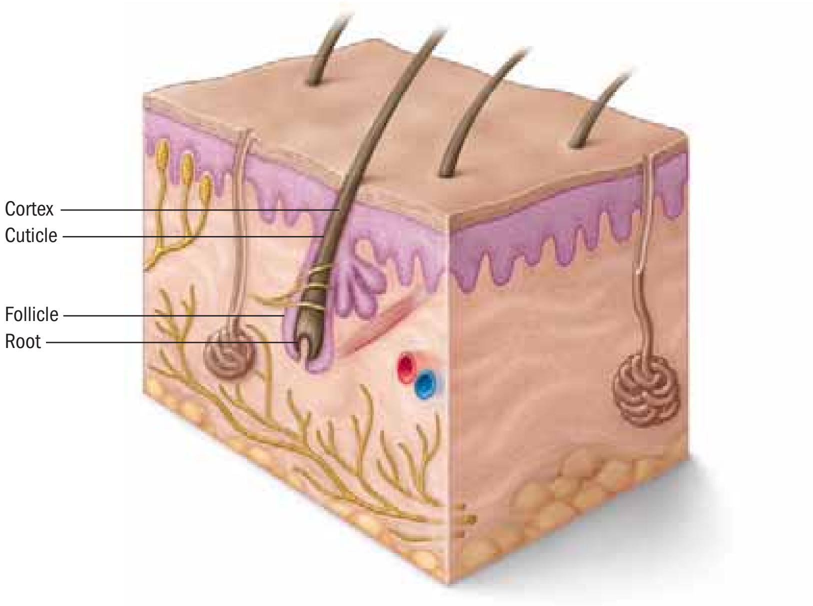


FIGURE 10–1 Cross section of skin showing hair growing out of a tubelike structure called the follicle.

Morphology of Hair

Hair is an appendage of the skin that grows out of an organ known as the *hair follicle*. The length of a hair extends from its root or bulb embedded in the follicle, continues into the shaft, and terminates at the tip end. The shaft, which is composed of three layers—the **cuticle**, **cortex**, and **medulla**—is most intensely examined by the forensic scientist (see Figure 10–1).

cuticle
The scale structure covering the exterior of the hair.

cortex
The main body of the hair shaft.

medulla
A cellular column running through the center of the hair.

The Cuticle Two features that make hair a good subject for establishing individual identity are its resistance to chemical decomposition and its ability to retain structural features over a long period of time. Much of this resistance and stability is attributed to the cuticle, a scale structure covering the exterior of the hair. The cuticle is formed by overlapping scales that always point toward the tip end of each hair. The scales form from specialized cells that have hardened *(keratinized)* and flattened in progressing from the follicle.

Although the scale pattern is not a useful characteristic for individualizing human hair, the variety of patterns formed by animal hair makes it an important feature for species identification. Figure 10–2 shows the scale patterns of some animal hairs and of a human hair as viewed by the scanning electron microscope. Another method of studying the scale pattern of hair is to make a cast of its surface. This is done by embedding the hair in a soft medium, such as clear nail polish or softened vinyl. When the medium has hardened, the hair is removed, leaving a clear, distinct impression of the hair's cuticle, ideal for examination with a compound microscope.

The Cortex Contained within the protective layer of the cuticle is the cortex, the main body of the hair shaft. The cortex is made up of spindle-shaped cortical cells aligned in a regular array, parallel to the length of the

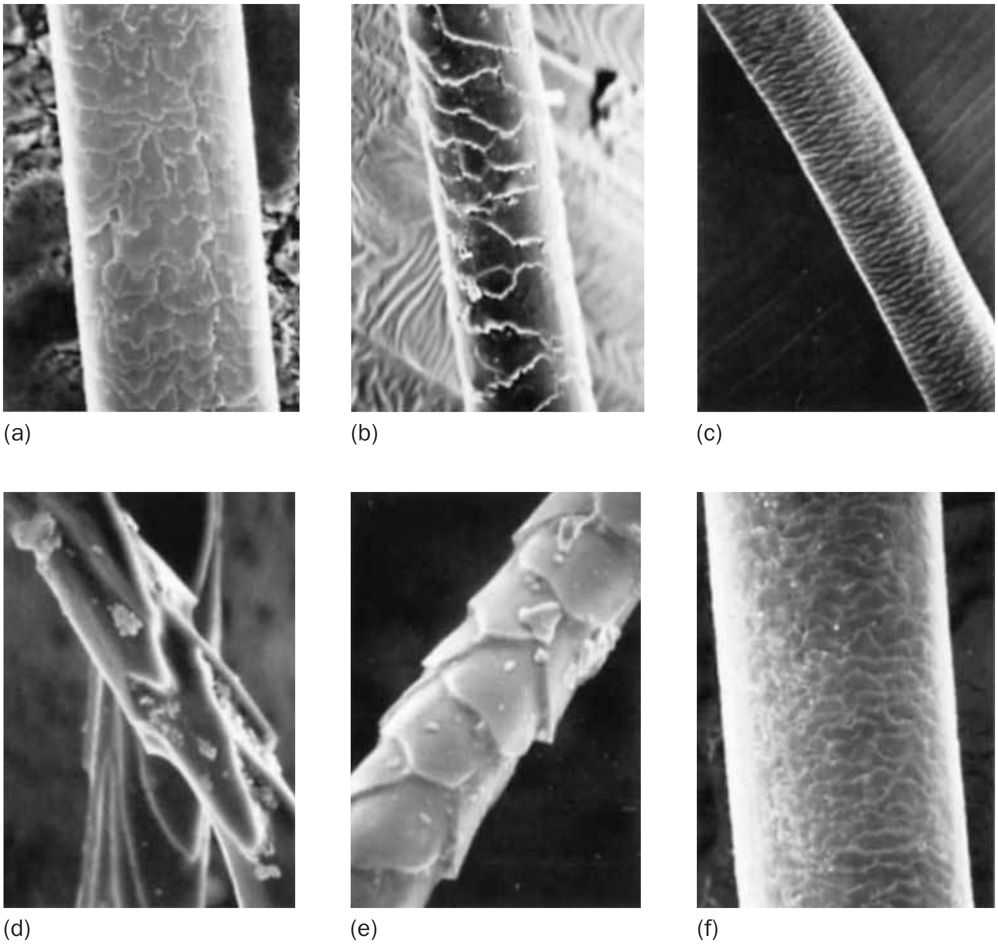


FIGURE 10–2 **Scale patterns of various types of hair. (a) Human head hair (600×), (b) dog (1250×), (c) deer (120×), (d) rabbit (300×), (e) cat (2000×), and (f) horse (450×).** *Courtesy International Scientific Instruments, Mountain View, Calif., and New Jersey State Police*

hair. The cortex derives its major forensic importance from the fact that it is embedded with the pigment granules that give hair its color. The color, shape, and distribution of these granules provide important points of comparison among the hairs of different individuals.

The structural features of the cortex are examined microscopically after the hair has been mounted in a liquid medium with a refractive index close to that of the hair. Under these conditions, the amount of light reflected off the hair's surface is minimized, and the amount of light penetrating the hair is optimized.

The Medulla The medulla is a collection of cells that looks like a central canal running through a hair. In many animals, this canal is a predominant feature, occupying more than half of the hair's diameter. The *medullary index* measures the diameter of the medulla relative to the diameter of the hair shaft and is normally expressed as a fraction. For humans, the index is generally less than one-third; for most other animals, the index is one-half or greater.

WebExtra 10.1
Test Your Skills as a Forensic Hair Examiner
www.prenhall.com/hsforensics

The presence and appearance of the medulla vary from individual to individual and even among the hairs of a given individual. Not all hairs

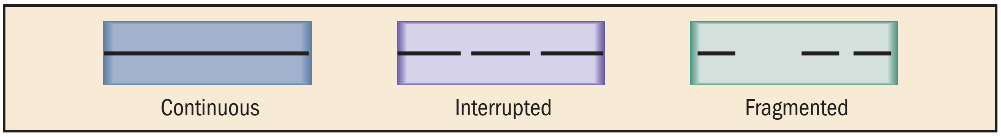


FIGURE 10–3 **Medulla patterns.**

have medullae, and when they do exist, the degree of medullation can vary. In this respect, medullae may be classified as being either continuous, interrupted, fragmented, or absent (see Figure 10–3). Human head hairs generally exhibit no medullae or have fragmented ones; they rarely show continuous medullation. One noted exception is the Mongoloid race, whose members usually have head hairs with continuous medullae. Also, most animals have medullae that are either continuous or interrupted.

Another interesting feature of the medulla is its shape. Humans, as well as many animals, have medullae that give a nearly cylindrical appearance. Other animals exhibit medullae that have a patterned shape. For example, the medulla of a cat can best be described as resembling a string of pearls, whereas members of the deer family show a medullary structure consisting of spherical cells occupying the entire hair shaft. Figure 10–4 illustrates medullary sizes and forms for a number of common animal hairs and a human head hair.

A searchable database on CD-ROM of the thirty-five most common animal hairs encountered in forensic casework is commercially available.[1] This database allows an examiner to rapidly search for animal hairs based on scale patterns and/or medulla type using a PC. A typical screen presentation arising from such a data search is shown in Figure 10–5.

The Root The root and other surrounding cells within the hair follicle provide the tools necessary to produce hair and continue its growth. Human head hair grows in three developmental stages, and the shape and size of the hair root is determined by the hair's current growth phase. The three phases of hair growth are the **anagen**, **catagen**, and **telogen phases.**

anagen phase
The initial growth phase during which the hair follicle actively produces hair.

catagen phase
A transition stage between the anagen and telogen phases of hair growth.

telogen phase
The final growth phase in which hair naturally falls out of the skin.

follicular tag
A translucent piece of tissue surrounding the hair's shaft near the root that contains the richest source of DNA associated with hair.

In the anagen phase (the initial growth phase), which may last up to six years, the root is attached to the follicle for continued growth, giving the root bulb a flame-shaped appearance [Figure 10–6(a)]. When pulled from the root, some hairs in the anagen phase have a **follicular tag.** With the advent of DNA analysis, this follicular tag is important for individualizing hair.

Hair continues to grow, but at a decreasing rate, during the catagen phase, which can last anywhere from two to three weeks. In the catagen phase, roots typically take on an elongated appearance [Figure 10–6(b)] as the root bulb shrinks and is pushed out of the hair follicle. Once hair growth ends, the telogen phase begins and the root takes on a club-shaped appearance [Figure 10–6(c)]. Over two to six months, the hair is pushed out of the follicle, causing the hair to be naturally shed.

Identification and Comparison of Hair

Most often the prime purpose for examining hair evidence in a crime laboratory is to establish whether the hair is human or animal in origin, or to determine whether human hair retrieved at a crime scene compares with hair from a particular individual. A careful microscopic examination of hair reveals morphological features that can distinguish human hair from

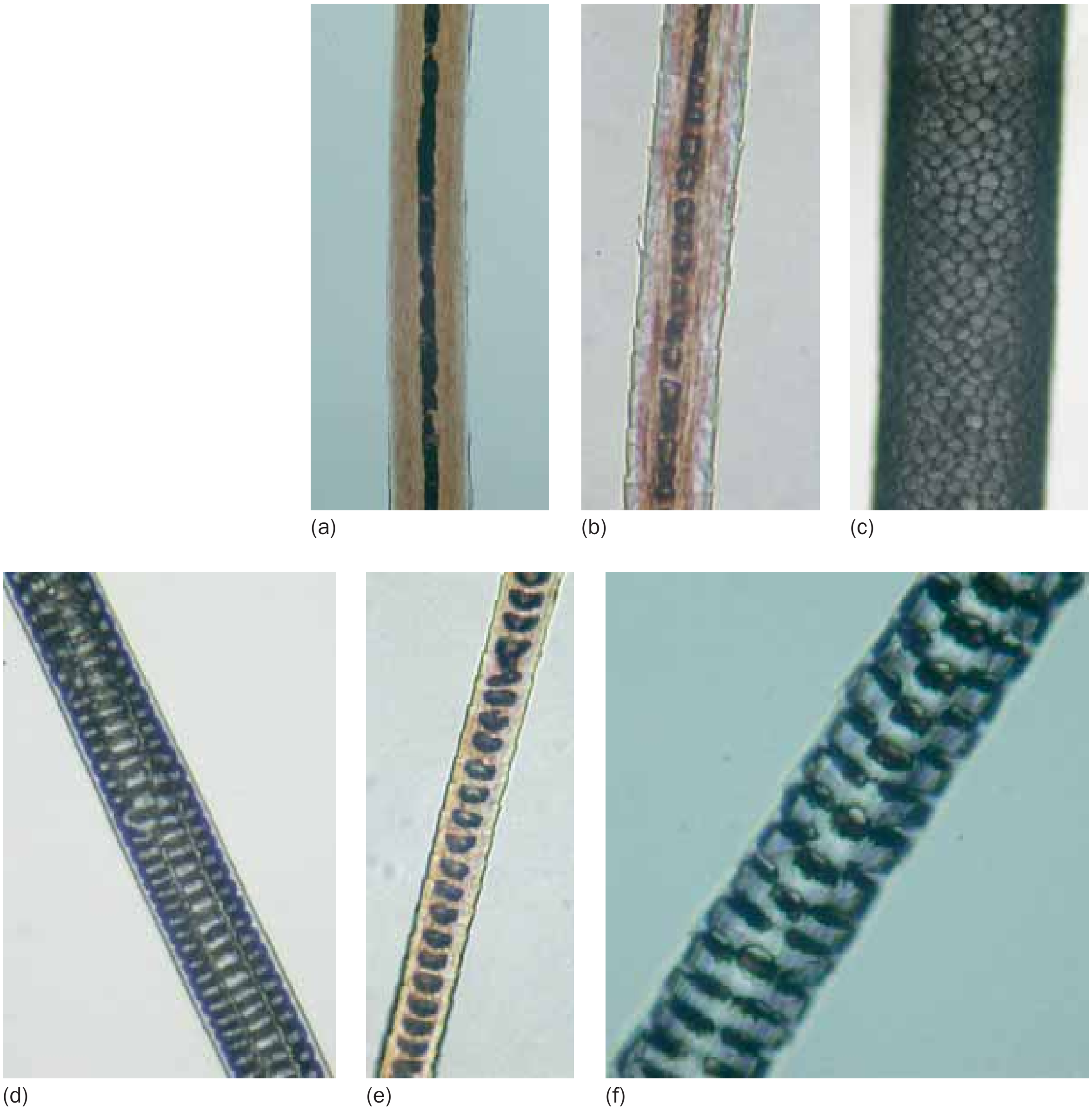


FIGURE 10–4 **Medulla patterns for various types of hair. (a) Human head hair (400×), (b) dog (400×), (c) deer (500×), (d) rabbit (450×), (e) cat (400×), and (f) mouse (500×).**

animal hair. The hair of various animals also differs enough in structure that the examiner can often identify the species. Before reaching such a conclusion, however, the examiner must have access to a comprehensive collection of reference standards and the accumulated experience of hundreds of prior hair examinations. Scale structure, medullary index, and medullary shape are particularly important in hair identification.

The most common request when hair is used as forensic evidence is to determine whether hair recovered at the crime scene compares to hair removed from a suspect. In most cases, such a comparison relates to hair obtained from the scalp or pubic area. Ultimately, the evidential value of the comparison depends on the degree of probability with which the examiner can associate the hair in question with a particular individual.

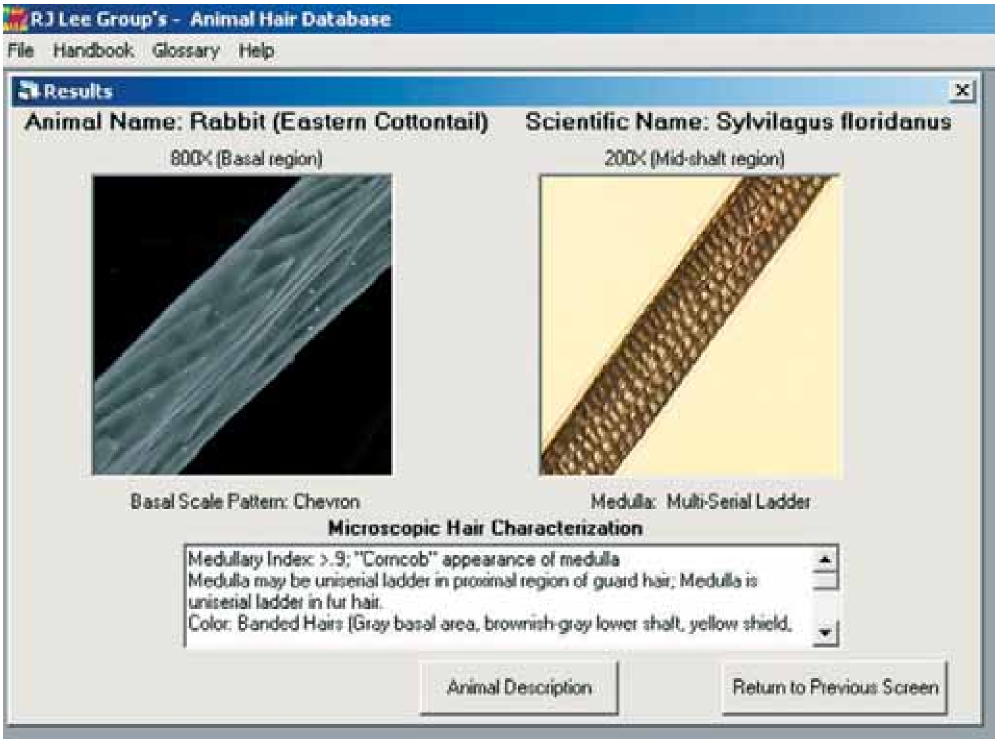


FIGURE 10–5 Information on rabbit hair contained within the *Forensic Animal Hair Atlas.* *Courtesy RJ Lee Group, Inc. Monroeville, Pa.*

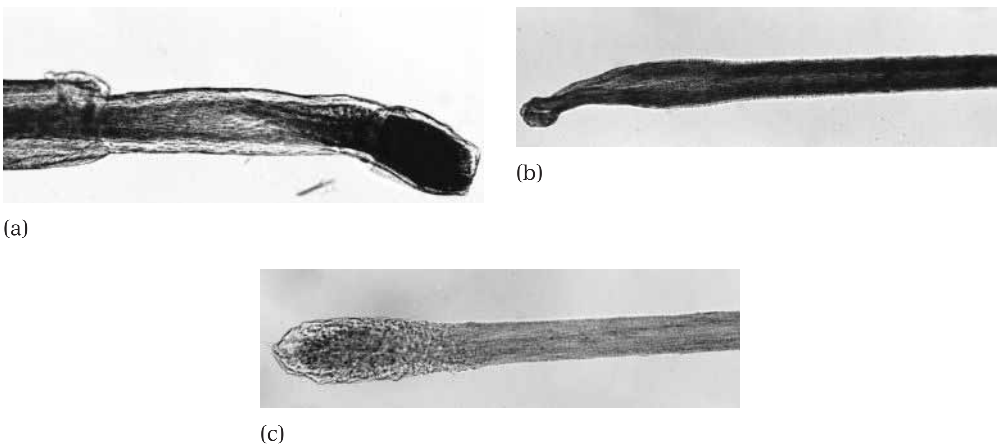


FIGURE 10–6 Hair roots in the (a) anagen phase, (b) catagen phase, and (c) telogen phase (100×). *Courtesy Charles A. Linch*

Factors in Comparison of Hair Although animal hair normally can be distinguished from human hair with little difficulty, human hair comparisons must be undertaken with extreme caution. Hair tends to exhibit variable morphological characteristics, not only from one person to another but also within a single individual. In comparing hair, the criminalist is particularly interested in matching the color, length, and diameter. Other important features are the presence or absence of a medulla and the distribution, shape, and color intensity of the pigment granules in the cortex. A microscopic examination may also distinguish dyed or bleached hair from natural hair.

A dyed color is often present in the cuticle as well as throughout the cortex. Bleaching, on the other hand, tends to remove pigment from the hair and gives it a yellowish tint.

If hair has grown since it was last bleached or dyed, the natural-end portion will be quite distinct in color. An estimate of the time since dyeing or bleaching can be made because hair grows approximately 1 centimeter per month. Other significant but less frequent features may be observed in hair. For example, morphological abnormalities may be present due to certain diseases or deficiencies. Also, the presence of fungal and nit infections can further link a hair specimen to a particular individual.

Microscopic Examination of Hair A comparison microscope is an invaluable tool that allows the examiner to view the questioned and known hair together, side by side. Any variations in the microscopic characteristics will thus be readily observed. Because hair from any part of the body exhibits a range of characteristics, it is necessary to have an adequate number of known hairs that are representative of all its features when making a comparison.

While microscopic comparison of hairs has long been accepted as an appropriate approach for including and excluding questioned hairs against standard/reference hairs, many forensic scientists have long recognized that this approach is very subjective and is highly dependent on the skills and integrity of the analyst, as well as the hair morphology being examined. However, until the advent of DNA analysis, the forensic science community had no choice but to rely on the microscope to carry out hair comparisons.

Any lingering doubts about the necessity of augmenting microscopic hair examinations with DNA analysis evaporated with the publication of an FBI study describing significant error rates associated with microscopic comparison of hairs.[2] Hair evidence submitted to the FBI for DNA analysis between 1996 and 2000 was examined both microscopically and by DNA analysis. Approximately 11 percent of the hairs (9 out of 80) in which FBI hair examiners found a positive microscopic match between questioned and standard/reference hairs were found to be nonmatches when they were later subjected to DNA analysis. The course of events is clear; microscopic hair comparisons must be regarded by police and courts as presumptive in nature and all positive microscopic hair comparisons must be confirmed by DNA determinations.

Questions about Hair Examination A number of questions may be asked to further ascertain the present status of forensic hair examinations. The answers to these questions can be of great significance to the investigator working with hair evidence.

Can the Body Area from Which a Hair Originated Be Determined? Normally it is easy to determine the body area from which a hair came. For example, scalp hairs generally show little diameter variation and have a more uniform distribution of pigment when compared to other body hairs. Pubic hairs are short and curly, with wide variations in shaft diameter, and usually have continuous medullae. Beard hairs are coarse, are normally triangular in cross-section, and have blunt tips acquired from cutting or shaving.

Can the Racial Origin of Hair Be Determined? In many instances, the examiner can distinguish hair originating from members of different races; this is especially true of Caucasian and Negroid head hair. Negroid

Case Study

The Central Park Jogger Case Revisited

Battery Park at night. *Courtesy Hans Deumling, Getty Images Inc. Image Bank*

On April 19, 1989, a young woman left her apartment around nine p.m. to jog in New York's Central Park. Nearly five hours later, she was found comatose lying in a puddle of mud in the park. She had been raped, her skull was fractured, and she had lost 75 percent of her blood. When the woman recovered, she had no memory of what happened to her. The brutality of the crime sent shock waves through the city and seemed to fuel a national perception that crime was running rampant and unchecked through the streets of New York.

Already in custody at the station house of the Central Park Precinct was a group of 14- and 15-year-old boys who had been rounded up leaving the park earlier in the night by police who suspected that they had been involved in a series of random attacks. Over the next two days, four of the teenagers gave videotaped statements, which they later recanted, admitting to participating in the attack. Ultimately, five of the teenagers were charged with the crime.

Interestingly, none of the semen collected from the victim could be linked to any of the defendants. However, according to the testimony of a forensic analyst, two head hairs collected from the clothing of one of the defendants microscopically compared to those of the victim, and a third hair collected from the same defendant's T-shirt microscopically compared to the victim's pubic hair. Besides these three hairs, a fourth hair was found microscopically similar to the victim's. This hair was recovered from the clothing of Steven Lopez, who was originally charged with rape but not prosecuted for the crime.

Hairs were the only pieces of physical evidence offered by the district attorney to directly link any of the teenagers to the crime. The hairs were cited by the district attorney as proof for the jury that the videotaped confessions of the teenagers were reliable. The five defendants were convicted and ultimately served from nine to thirteen years.

In August 1989, more than three months after the jogger attack, New York Police arrested a man named Matias Reyes, who pleaded guilty to murdering a pregnant woman, raping three others, and committing a robbery. Reyes was sentenced to thirty-three years to life for these crimes. In January 2002, Reyes also confessed to the Central Park attack. Follow-up tests revealed that Reyes's DNA compared to semen recovered from the jogger's body and her sock. Other DNA tests showed that the hairs offered into evidence at the original trial did not come from the victim, and so could not be used to link the teenagers to the crime as the district attorney had argued. After an eleven-month reinvestigation of the original charges, a New York State Supreme Court judge dismissed all the convictions against the five teenage suspects in the Central Park jogger case.

hairs are normally kinky, containing dense, unevenly distributed pigments. Caucasian hairs are usually straight or wavy, with very fine to coarse pigments that are more evenly distributed when compared to Negroid hair.

Sometimes a cross-sectional examination of hair may help identify race. Cross-sections of hair from Caucasians are oval to round in shape, whereas cross-sections of Negroid hair are flat to oval in shape. However, all of these observations are general, with many possible exceptions. The criminalist must approach the determination of race from hair with caution and a good deal of experience.

Can the Age and Sex of an Individual Be Determined from a Hair Sample? The age of an individual cannot be learned from a hair examination with any degree of certainty except with infant hair. Infant hairs are fine and short and have fine pigmentation. Although the presence of dye or bleach on the hair may offer some clue to sex, present hairstyles make these characteristics less valuable than they were in the past. The recovery of nuclear DNA either from tissue adhering to hair or from the root structure of the hair will allow a determination of whether the hair originated from a male or female (see p. 328).

Is It Possible to Determine Whether Hair Was Forcibly Removed from the Body? A microscopic examination of the hair root may establish whether the hair fell out or was pulled out of the skin. A hair root with follicular tissue (root sheath cells) adhering to it, as shown in Figure 10–7, indicates a hair that has been pulled out either by a person or by brushing or combing. Hair naturally falling off the body has a bulbous-shaped root free of any adhering tissue.

The absence of sheath cells cannot always be relied on for correctly judging whether hair has been forcibly pulled from the body. In some cases the root of a hair is devoid of any adhering tissue even when it has been pulled from the body. Apparently, an important consideration is how quickly the hair is pulled out of the head. Hairs pulled quickly from the head are much more likely to have sheath cells compared to hairs that have been removed slowly from the scalp.[3]

nuclear DNA
DNA that is present in the nucleus of a cell and that is inherited from both parents.

Are Efforts Being Made to Individualize Human Hair? As we saw in Chapter 9, forensic scientists routinely isolate and characterize individual variations in DNA. Forensic hair examiners can link human hair to a particular individual by characterizing the **nuclear DNA** in the hair root or

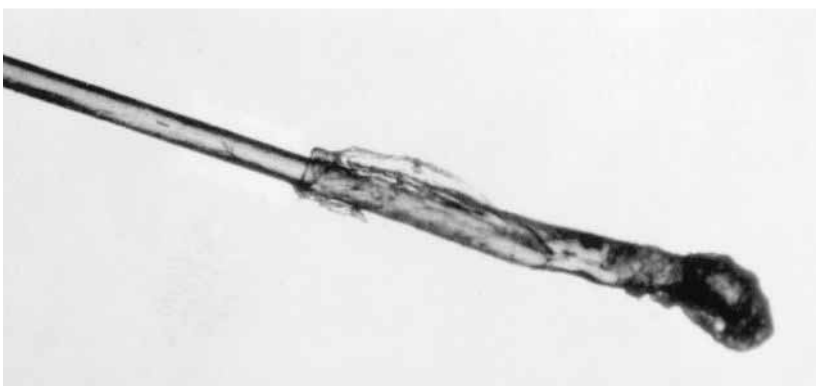


FIGURE 10–7 Forcibly removed head hair, with follicular tissue attached. *Courtesy New Jersey State Police*

in follicular tissue adhering to the root (see Figure 10–7). Recall that the follicular tag is the richest source of DNA associated with hair. In the absence of follicular tissue, an examiner must extract DNA from the hair root.

The growth phase of hair (see p. 359) is a useful predictor of the likelihood of successfully typing DNA in human hair.[4] Examiners have a higher success rate in extracting DNA from hair roots in the anagen phase or from anagen-phase hairs entering the catagen phase of growth. Telogen-phase hairs have an inadequate amount of DNA for typing. Because most hairs are naturally shed and are expected to be in the telogen stage, these observations do not portend well for hairs collected at crime scenes. However, some crime scenes are populated with forcibly removed hairs that are expected to be rich sources for nuclear DNA.

When a questioned hair does not have adhering tissue or a root structure amenable to isolation of nuclear DNA, there is an alternative—**mitochondrial DNA.** Unlike the nuclear DNA described earlier, which is located in the nuclei of practically every cell in our body, mitochondrial DNA is found in cellular material outside the nucleus. Interestingly, unlike nuclear DNA, which is passed down to us from both parents, mitochondrial DNA is transmitted only from mother to child. Importantly, many more copies of mitochondrial DNA are located in our cells as compared to nuclear DNA. For this reason, the success rate of finding and typing mitochondrial DNA is much greater from samples, such as hair, that have limited quantities of nuclear DNA. Hairs 1–2 centimeters long can be subjected to mitochondrial analysis with extremely high odds of success. This subject is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

mitochondrial DNA
DNA present in small structures (mitochondria) outside the nucleus of a cell. Mitochondria supply energy to the cell. This form of DNA is inherited maternally (from the mother).

Can DNA Individualize a Human Hair? In some cases, the answer is yes. As we learned in Chapter 9, nuclear DNA produces frequencies of occurrence as low as one in billions or trillions. On the other hand, mitochondrial DNA cannot individualize human hair, but its diversity within the human population often permits exclusion of a significant portion of a population as potential contributors of a hair sample. Ideally, the combination of a positive microscopic comparison and an association through nuclear or mitochondrial DNA analysis strongly links a questioned hair and standard/reference hairs. However, a word of caution: mitochondrial DNA cannot distinguish microscopically similar hairs from different individuals who are maternally related.

Collection and Preservation of Hair Evidence

When questioned hairs are submitted to a forensic laboratory for examination, they must always be accompanied by an adequate number of standard/reference samples from the victim of the crime and from individuals suspected of having deposited hair at the crime scene. We have learned that hair from different parts of the body varies significantly in its physical characteristics. Likewise, hair from any one area of the body can also have a wide range of characteristics. For this reason, the questioned and standard/reference hairs must come from the same area of the body; one cannot, for instance, compare head hair to pubic hair. It is also important that the collection of standard/reference hair be carried out in a way to ensure a representative sampling of hair from any one area of the body.

Forensic hair comparisons generally involve either head hair or pubic hair. Collecting fifty full-length hairs from all areas of the scalp normally ensures a representative sampling of head hair. Likewise, a minimum collection of twenty-four full-length pubic hairs should cover the range of characteristics present in this type of hair. In rape cases, care must first be

Forensic Brief

Bill Cosby and his son Ennis Cosby. *Courtesy Andrea Mohin, The New York Times*

The murder of Ennis Cosby, son of entertainer Bill Cosby, at first appeared unsolvable. It was a random act. When his car tire went flat, Ennis pulled off the road and called a friend on his cellular phone to ask for assistance. Shortly thereafter, an assailant demanded money and, when Cosby didn't respond quickly enough, shot him once in the temple. Acting on a tip from a friend of the assailant, police investigators later found a .38-caliber revolver wrapped in a blue cap miles from the crime scene. Mikail Markhasev was arrested and charged with murder.

At trial, the district attorney introduced firearms evidence to show that the recovered gun had fired the bullet aimed at Cosby. However, a single hair also recovered from the hat dramatically linked Markhasev to the crime. Los Angeles Police Department forensic analyst Harry Klann identified six DNA markers from the follicular tissue adhering to the hair root that matched Markhasev's DNA. This particular DNA profile is found in one out of 15,500 members of the general population. Upon hearing all the evidence, the jury deliberated and convicted Markhasev of murder.

taken to comb the pubic area with a clean comb to remove all loose foreign hair present before the victim is sampled for standard/reference hair. The comb should then be packaged in a separate envelope.

Because a hair may vary in color and other morphological features over its entire length, the entire hair is collected. This requirement is best accomplished by either pulling the hair out of the skin or clipping it at the skin line. During an autopsy, hair samples are routinely collected from a victim of suspicious death. Because the autopsy may occur early in an investigation, the need for hair standard/reference samples may not always be apparent. However, one should never rule out the possible involvement of hair evidence in subsequent investigative findings. Failure to make this simple collection may result in complicated legal problems later.

Key Points

- The hair shaft is composed of three layers called the cuticle, cortex, and medulla and is most intensely examined by the forensic scientist.

- When comparing strands of hair, the criminalist is particularly interested in matching the color, length, and diameter. Other important features for comparing hair are the presence or absence of a medulla and the distribution, shape, and color intensity of pigment granules in the cortex.

- The probability of detecting DNA in hair roots is more likely for hair being examined in its anagen or early growth phase as opposed to its catagen or telogen phases.
- The follicular tag, a translucent piece of tissue surrounding the hair's shaft near the root, is a rich source of DNA associated with hair. Mitochondrial DNA can also be extracted from the hair shaft.
- All positive microscopic hair comparisons must be confirmed by DNA analysis.

Forensic Examination of Fibers

Just as hair left at a crime scene can serve as identification, the same logic can reasonably be extended to the fibers that compose our fabrics and garments. Fibers may become important evidence in incidents that involve personal contact—such as homicide, assault, and sexual offenses—in which cross-transfers may occur between the clothing of suspect and victim. Similarly, the force of impact between a hit-and-run victim and a vehicle often leaves fibers, threads, or even whole pieces of clothing adhering to parts of the vehicle. Fibers may also become fixed in screens or glass broken in the course of a breaking-and-entering attempt.

Regardless of where and under what conditions fibers are recovered, their ultimate value as forensic evidence depends on the criminalist's ability to narrow their origin to a limited number of sources or even to a single source. Unfortunately, mass production of garments and fabrics has limited the value of fiber evidence in this respect, and only rarely do fibers recovered at a crime scene provide individual identification with a high degree of certainty.

Types of Fibers

For centuries, humans depended on fibers derived from natural sources such as plants and animals. However, early in the twentieth century, the first manufactured fiber—rayon—became a practical reality, followed in the 1920s by the introduction of cellulose acetate. Since the late 1930s, scientists have produced dozens of new fibers. In fact, the development of fibers, fabrics, finishes, and other textile-processing techniques has made greater advances since 1900 than in the preceding five thousand years of recorded history. Today, such varied items as clothing, carpeting, drapes, wigs, and even artificial turf attest to the predominant role that manufactured fibers have come to play in our culture and environment. When discussing forensic examination of fibers, it is convenient to classify them into two broad groups: *natural* and *manufactured*.

Natural Fibers **Natural fibers** are wholly derived from animal or plant sources. Animal fibers comprise most natural fibers encountered in crime laboratory examinations. These include hair coverings from such animals as sheep (wool), goats (mohair, cashmere), camels, llamas, alpacas, and vicuñas. Fur fibers include those obtained from animals such as mink, rabbit, beaver, and muskrat.

natural fibers
Fibers derived entirely from animal or plant sources.

Forensic examination of animal fibers uses the same procedures discussed in the previous section for the forensic examination of animal hairs.

Identification and comparison of such fibers relies solely on a microscopic examination of color and morphological characteristics. Again, a sufficient number of standard/reference specimens must be examined to establish the range of fiber characteristics that comprise the suspect fabric.

By far the most prevalent plant fiber is cotton. The wide use of undyed white cotton fibers in clothing and other fabrics has made its evidential value almost meaningless, although the presence of dyed cotton in a combination of colors has, in some cases, enhanced its evidential significance. The microscopic view of cotton fiber shown in Figure 10–8 reveals its most distinguishing feature—a ribbonlike shape with twists at irregular intervals.

manufactured fibers
Fibers derived from either natural or synthetic polymers.

Manufactured Fibers Beginning with the introduction of rayon in 1911 and the development of nylon in 1939, **manufactured fibers** have increasingly replaced natural fibers in garments and fabrics. Such fibers are marketed under hundreds of different trade names. To reduce consumer confusion, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission has approved "generic" or family names for the grouping of all manufactured fibers. Many of these generic classes are produced by several manufacturers and are sold under a confusing variety of trade names. For example, in the United States, polyesters are marketed under names that include Dacron, Fortrel, and Kodel. In England, polyesters are called Terylene. Table 10–1 lists major generic fibers, along with common trade names and their characteristics and applications.

The first machine-made fibers were manufactured from raw materials derived from cotton or wood pulp. These materials are processed, and pure cellulose is extracted from them. Depending on the type of fiber desired, the cellulose may be chemically treated and dissolved in an appropriate solvent

FIGURE 10–8 **Photomicrograph of cotton fiber (450×).**

Table 10–1 Major Generic Fibers

Major Generic Fiber	Characteristics	Major Domestic and Industrial Uses
Acetate	• Luxurious feel and appearance • Wide range of colors and lusters • Excellent drapability and softness • Relatively fast-drying • Shrink-, moth-, and mildew-resistant	*Apparel:* Blouses, dresses, foundation garments, lingerie, linings, shirts, slacks, sportswear *Fabrics:* Brocade, crepe, double knits, faille, knitted jerseys, lace, satin, taffeta, tricot *Home Furnishings:* Draperies, upholstery *Other:* Cigarette filters, fiberfill for pillows, quilted products
Acrylic	• Soft and warm • Wool-like • Retains shape • Resilient • Quick-drying • Resistant to moths, sunlight, oil, and chemicals	*Apparel:* Dresses, infant wear, knitted garments, skiwear, socks, sportswear, sweaters *Fabrics:* Fleece and pile fabrics, face fabrics in bonded fabrics, simulated furs, jerseys *Home Furnishings:* Blankets carpets, draperies, upholstery *Other:* Auto tops, awnings, hand-knitting and craft yarns, industrial and geotextile fabrics
Aramid	• Does not melt • Highly flame-resistant • Great strength • Great resistance to stretch • Maintains shape and form at high temperatures	Hot-gas filtration fabrics, protective clothing, military helmets, protective vests, structural composites for aircraft and boats, sailcloth, tires, ropes and cables, mechanical rubber goods, marine and sporting goods
Bicomponent	• Thermal bonding • Self bulking • Very fine fibers • Unique cross-sections • The functionality of special polymers or additives at reduced cost	Uniform distribution of adhesive; fiber remains a part of structure and adds integrity; customized sheath materials to bond various materials; wide range of bonding temperatures; cleaner, environmentally friendly (*no effluent*); recyclable; lamination/molding/densification of composites
Lyocell	• Soft, strong, absorbent • Good dyeability • Fibrillates during wet processing to produce special textures	Dresses, slacks, and coats
Melamine	• White and dyeable • Flame resistance and low thermal conductivity • High-heat dimensional stability • Processable on standard textile equipment	*Fire-Blocking Fabrics:* Aircraft seating, fire blockers for upholstered furniture in high-risk occupancies (e.g., to meet California TB 133 requirements) *Protective Clothing:* Firefighters' turnout gear, insulating thermal liners, knit hoods, molten metal splash apparel, heat-resistant gloves *Filter Media:* High-capacity, high-efficiency, high-temperature baghouse air filters
Modacrylic	• Soft • Resilient • Abrasion- and flame-resistant • Quick-drying • Resists acids and alkalies • Retains shape	*Apparel:* Deep-pile coats, trims, linings, simulated fur, wigs and hairpieces *Fabrics:* Fleece fabrics, industrial fabrics, knit-pile fabric backings, nonwoven fabrics *Home Furnishings:* Awnings, blankets, carpets, flame-resistant draperies and curtains, scatter rugs *Other:* Filters, paint rollers, stuffed toys

(*continued*)

Table 10–1 Major Generic Fibers (*continued*)

Major Generic Fiber	Characteristics	Major Domestic and Industrial Uses
Nylon	• Exceptionally strong • Supple • Abrasion-resistant • Lustrous • Easy to wash • Resists damage from oil and many chemicals • Resilient • Low in moisture absorbency	*Apparel:* Blouses, dresses, foundation garments, hosiery, lingerie and underwear, raincoats, ski and snow apparel, suits, windbreakers *Home Furnishings:* Bedspreads, carpets, draperies, curtains, upholstery *Other:* Air hoses, conveyor and seat belts, parachutes, racket strings, ropes and nets, sleeping bags, tarpaulins, tents, thread, tire cord, geotextiles
Olefin	• Unique wicking properties that make it very comfortable • Abrasion-resistant • Quick-drying • Resistant to deterioration from chemicals, mildew, perspiration, rot, and weather • Sensitive to heat • Soil resistant • Strong; very lightweight • Excellent colorfastness	*Apparel:* Pantyhose, underwear, knitted sports shirts, men's half-hose, men's knitted sportswear, sweaters *Home Furnishings:* Carpet and carpet backing, slipcovers, upholstery *Other:* Dye nets, filter fabrics, laundry and sandbags, geotextiles, automotive interiors, cordage, doll hair, industrial sewing thread
Polyester	• Strong • Resistant to stretching and shrinking • Resistant to most chemicals • Quick-drying • Crisp and resilient when wet or dry • Wrinkle- and abrasion-resistant • Retains heat-set pleats and creases • Easy to wash	*Apparel:* Blouses, shirts, career apparel, children's wear, dresses, half-hose, insulated garments, ties, lingerie and underwear, permanent press garments, slacks, suits *Home Furnishings:* Carpets, curtains, draperies, sheets and pillowcases *Other:* Fiberfill for various products, fire hose, power belting, ropes and nets, tire cord, sail, V-belts
PBI	• Extremely flame-resistant • Outstanding comfort factor combined with thermal and chemical stability properties • Will not burn or melt • Low shrinkage when exposed to flame	Suitable for high-performance protective apparel such as firefighters' turnout coats, astronaut space suits, and applications in which fire resistance is important
Rayon	• Highly absorbent • Soft and comfortable • Easy to dye • Versatile • Good drapability	*Apparel:* Blouses, coats, dresses, jackets, lingerie, linings, millinery, rainwear, slacks, sports shirts, sportswear, suits, ties, work clothes *Home Furnishings:* Bedspreads, blankets, carpets, curtains, draperies, sheets, slipcovers, tablecloths, upholstery *Other:* Industrial products, medical-surgical products, nonwoven products, tire cord
Spandex	• Can be stretched 500 percent without breaking • Can be stretched repeatedly and recover original length • Lightweight • Stronger and more durable than rubber • Resistant to body oils	*Articles* (in which stretch is desired): Athletic apparel, bathing suits, delicate laces, foundation garments, golf jackets, ski pants, slacks, support and surgical hose

Source: American Fiber Manufacturers Assoc. Inc., Washington, D.C., *http://www.fingersource.com/f-tutor/q-guide.htm.*

before it is forced through the small holes of a spinning jet, or spinneret, to produce the fiber. Fibers manufactured from natural raw materials in this manner are classified as *regenerated fibers* and commonly include rayon, acetate, and triacetate, all of which are produced from regenerated cellulose.

Most of the fibers currently manufactured are produced solely from synthetic chemicals and are therefore classified as *synthetic fibers*. These include nylons, polyesters, and acrylics. The creation of synthetic fibers became a reality only when scientists developed a method of synthesizing long-chained molecules called **polymers.**

polymer
A substance composed of a large number of atoms that are usually arranged in repeating units.

In 1930, chemists discovered an unusual characteristic of one of the polymers under investigation. When a glass rod in contact with viscous material in a beaker was slowly pulled away, the substance adhered to the rod and formed a fine filament that hardened as soon as it entered the cool air. Furthermore, the cold filaments could be stretched several times their extended length to produce a flexible, strong, and attractive fiber. This first synthetic fiber was improved and then marketed as nylon. Since then, fiber chemists have successfully synthesized new polymers and have developed more efficient methods for manufacturing them. These efforts have produced a multitude of synthetic fibers.

Polymers The polymer is the basic chemical substance of all synthetic fibers. Indeed, an almost unbelievable array of household, industrial, and recreational products is manufactured from polymers; these include plastics, paints, adhesives, and synthetic rubber. Polymers exist in countless forms and varieties and with the proper treatment can be made to assume different chemical and physical properties.

As we have already observed, chemical substances are composed of basic structural units called **molecules.** The molecules of most materials are composed of just a few atoms; for example, water, H_2O, has 2 atoms of hydrogen and 1 atom of oxygen. The heroin molecule, $C_{21}H_{23}O_5N$, contains 21 atoms of carbon, 23 atoms of hydrogen, 5 atoms of oxygen, and 1 atom of nitrogen. Polymers, on the other hand, are formed by linking a large number of molecules, so that a polymer often contains thousands or even millions of atoms. This is why polymers are often referred to as **macromolecules,** or "big" molecules.

molecule
Two or more atoms held together by chemical bonds.

macromolecule
A molecule with a high molecular mass.

Simply, a polymer can be pictured as resembling a long, repeating chain, with each link representing the basic structure of the polymer (see Figure 10–9). The repeating molecular units in the polymer, called **monomers,** are joined end to end, so that thousands link to form a long chain. What makes polymer chemistry so fascinating is the countless possibilities for linking different molecules. By simply varying the chemical

monomer
The basic unit of structure from which a polymer is constructed.

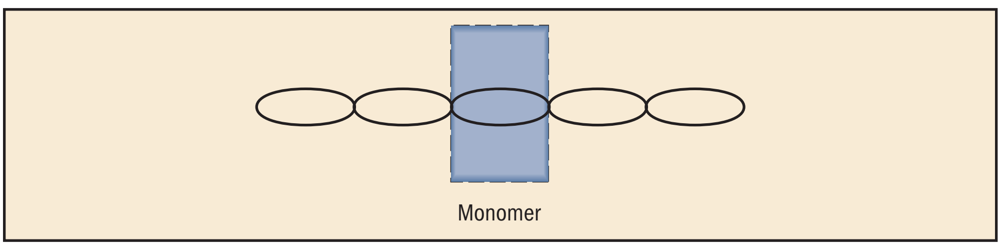


FIGURE 10–9 The chain-link model of a segment of a polymer molecule. The molecule may contain as many as several million monomer units or links.

structure of the monomers, and by devising numerous ways to weave them together, chemists have created polymers that exhibit different properties. This versatility enables polymer chemists to synthesize glues, plastics, paints, and fibers.

Not all polymers are synthesized in the chemical laboratory; nature has produced polymers that humans have not yet been able to copy. For example, the proteins that form the basic structure of animal hairs, as well as of all living matter, are polymers, composed of thousands of amino acids linked in a highly organized arrangement and sequence. Similarly, cellulose (the basic ingredient of wood and cotton) and starch are both natural polymers built by the combination of several thousand carbohydrate monomers, as shown in Figure 10–10. Hence, the synthesis of manufactured fibers merely represents an extension of chemical principles that nature has used to produce hair and vegetable fibers.

Identification and Comparison of Manufactured Fibers

The evidential value of fibers lies in the criminalist's ability to trace their origin. Obviously, if the examiner is presented with fabrics that can be exactly fitted together at their torn edges, the fabrics must be of common origin. Such a fit is demonstrated in Figure 10–11 for a piece of fabric that was removed from a vehicle suspected of involvement in a hit-and-run fatality. The exact fit with the remains of the victim's trousers directly implicated the car's driver in the incident.

More often, however, the criminalist obtains a limited number of fibers for identification and comparison. Generally, in these situations obtaining a physical match is unlikely, and the examiner must resort to a side-by-side comparison of the standard/reference and crime-scene fibers.

Microscopic Examination of Fibers The first and most important step in the examination is a microscopic comparison for color and diameter using a comparison microscope. Unless these two characteristics agree, there is little reason to suspect a match. Other morphological features that may aid in the comparison are lengthwise striations (lined markings) on the surface of some fibers and the pitting of the fiber's surface with delustering particles (usually titanium dioxide) added in the manufacturing process to reduce shine (see Figure 10–12).

The cross-sectional shape of a fiber may also help characterize the fiber.[5] In the Wayne Williams case (see the case reading at the end of

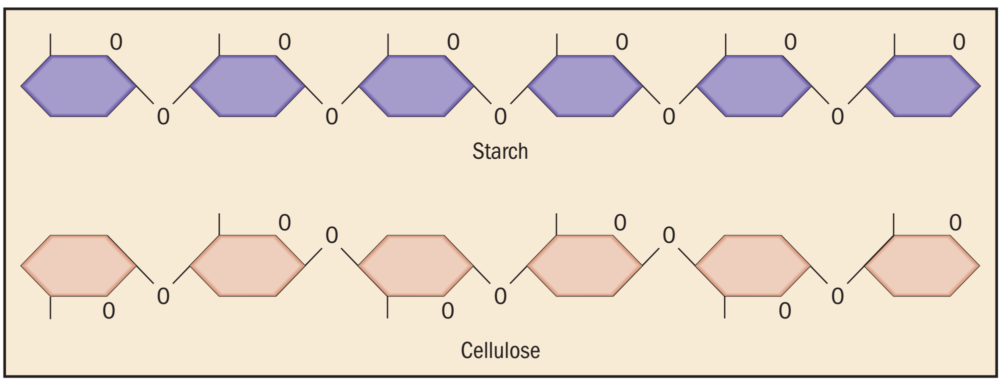


FIGURE 10–10 Starch and cellulose are natural carbohydrate polymers consisting of a large number of repeating units or monomers.

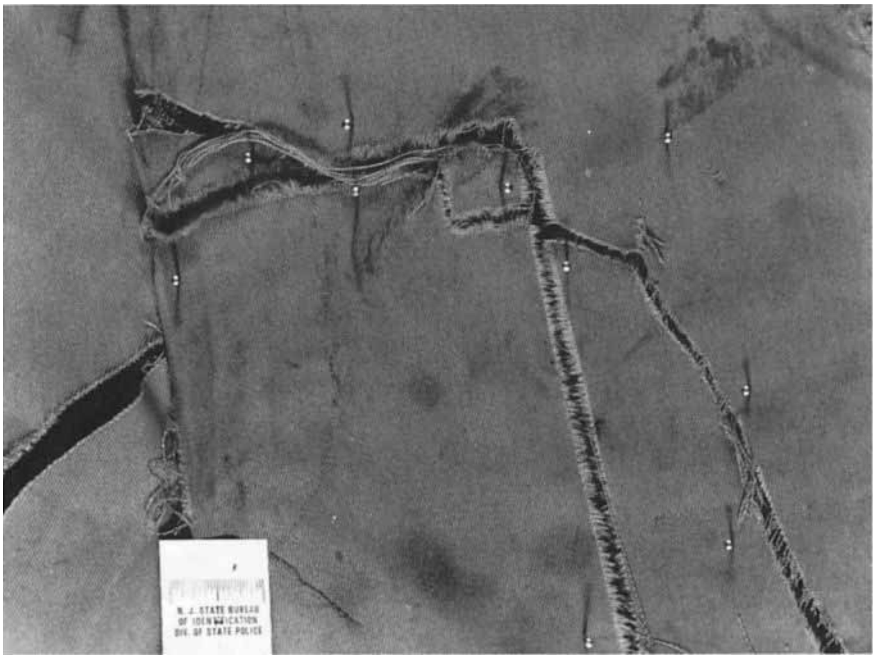
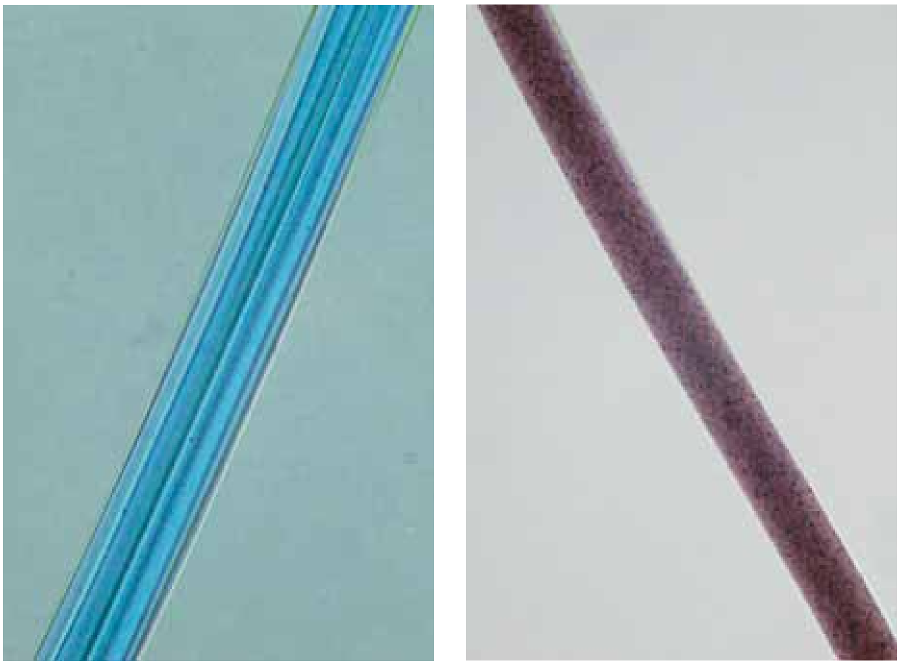


FIGURE 10–11 A piece of fabric found on a suspect hit-and-run vehicle inserted into the torn trousers of the victim. *Courtesy New Jersey State Police*



(a) (b)

FIGURE 10–12 Photomicrographs of synthetic fibers: (a) cellulose triacetate (450×) and (b) olefin fiber embedded with titanium dioxide particles (450×).

Chapter 3), unusually shaped yellow-green fibers discovered on a number of the murder victims were linked to a carpet in the Williams home. This fiber was a key element in proving Williams's guilt. A photomicrograph of this unusually shaped fiber is shown in Figure 10–13.

Although two fibers may seem to have the same color when viewed under the microscope, compositional differences may actually exist in the

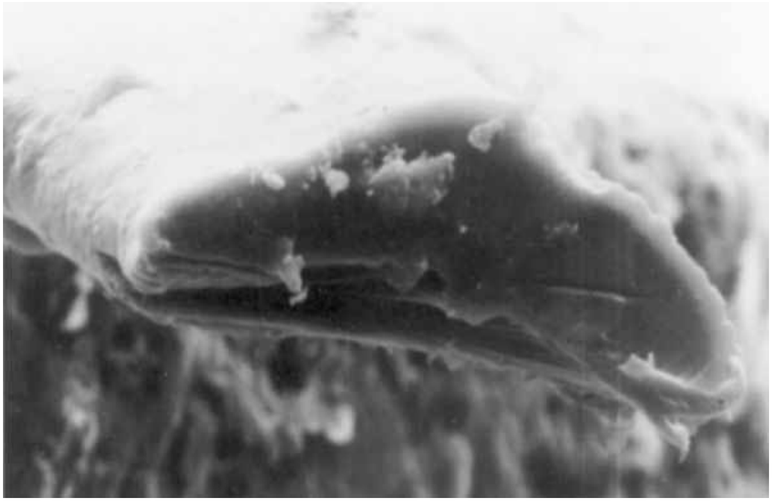


FIGURE 10–13 A scanning electron photomicrograph of the cross-section of a nylon fiber removed from a sheet used to transport the body of a murder victim. The fiber, associated with a carpet in Wayne Williams's home, was manufactured in 1971 in relatively small quantities. *Courtesy Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.*

dyes that were applied to them during their manufacture. In fact, most textile fibers are impregnated with a mixture of dyes selected to obtain a desired shade or color. The significance of a fiber comparison is enhanced when the forensic examiner can show that the questioned and standard/reference fibers have the same dye composition.

Analytical Techniques Used in Fiber Examination The visible-light microspectrophotometer (pp. 248–249) is a convenient way for analysts to compare the colors of fibers through spectral patterns. This technique is not limited by sample size—a fiber as small as 1 millimeter long or less can be examined by this type of microscope. The examination is nondestructive and is carried out on fibers simply mounted on a microscope slide.

A more detailed analysis of the fiber's dye composition can be obtained through a chromatographic separation of the dye constituents. To accomplish this, small strands of fibers are compared for dye content by first extracting the dye off each fiber with a suitable solvent and then spotting the dye solution onto a thin-layer chromatography plate. The dye components of the questioned and standard/reference fibers are separated on the thin-layer plate and compared side by side for similarity.[6]

Chemical Composition. Once this phase of the analysis is complete, and before any conclusion can be reached that two or more fibers compare, they must be shown to have the same chemical composition. In this respect, tests are performed to confirm that all of the fibers involved belong to the same broad generic class. Additionally, the comparison will be substantially enhanced if it can be demonstrated that all of the fibers belong to the same subclassification within their generic class. For example, at least four different types of nylon are available in commercial and consumer markets, including nylon 6, nylon 6–10, nylon 11, and nylon 6–6. Although all types of nylon have many properties in common, each may differ in physical shape, appearance, and dyeability because of modifications in basic chemical structure. Similarly, a study of more than two hundred different samples of acrylic fibers revealed that they could actually be divided into twenty-four distinguishable groups on the basis of their polymeric structure and microscopic characteristics.[7]

Textile chemists have devised numerous tests for determining the class of a fiber. However, unlike the textile chemist, the criminalist frequently does not have the luxury of having a substantial quantity of fabric to work with and must therefore select tests that will yield the most information with the least amount of material. Only a single fiber may be available for analysis, and often this may amount to no more than a minute strand recovered from a fingernail scraping of a homicide or rape victim.

Birefringence. A useful physical property of fibers is that many manufactured fibers exhibit double refraction or birefringence (discussed in Chapter 4). Synthetic fibers are manufactured by melting a polymeric substance or dissolving it in a solvent and then forcing it through the very fine holes of a spinneret. The polymer emerges as a very fine filament, with its molecules aligned parallel to the length of the filament (see Figure 10–14). Just as the regular arrangement of atoms produces a crystal, so will the regular arrangement of the fiber's polymers cause crystallinity in the finished fiber. This crystallinity makes a fiber stiff and strong and gives it the optical property of double refraction.

Polarized white light passing through a synthetic fiber is split into two rays that are perpendicular to each other, causing the fiber to display polarization or interference colors when viewed under a polarizing microscope (see Figure 10–15). Depending on the class of fiber, each polarized plane of light has a characteristic index of refraction. This value can be determined by immersing the fiber in a fluid with a comparable refractive index and observing the disappearance of the Becke line under a polarizing microscope. Table 10–2 lists the two refractive indices of some common classes of fibers, along with their birefringence. The virtue of this technique is that a single microscopic fiber can be analyzed in a nondestructive manner.

Infrared Absorption. The polymers that compose a manufactured fiber, just as in any other organic substance, selectively absorb infrared light in a characteristic pattern. Infrared spectrophotometry thus provides a rapid and reliable method for identifying the generic class, and in some cases the subclasses, of fibers. The infrared microspectrophotometer combines a microscope with an infrared spectrophotometer (see p. 249). Such a combination makes possible the infrared analysis of a small single-strand fiber while it is being viewed under a microscope.[8]

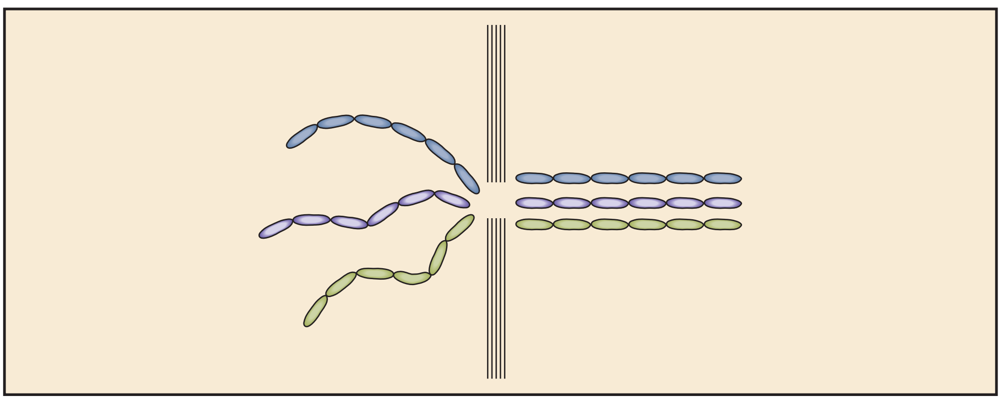


FIGURE 10–14 In the production of manufactured fibers, the bulk polymer is forced through small holes to form a filament in which all the polymers are aligned in the same direction.

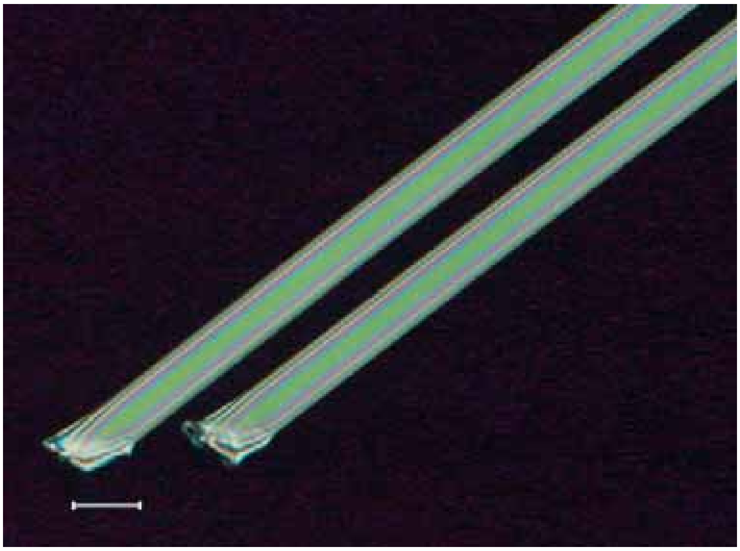


FIGURE 10–15 A photomicrograph of nylon fibers displaying interference colors when observed between the crossed polars of a polarizing microscope (50×). *Courtesy William Randle, Missouri State Highway Patrol crime laboratory, Jefferson City, Mo.*

Table 10–2 Refractive Indices of Common Textile Fibers

	Refractive Index		
Fiber	**Parallel**	**Perpendicular**	**Birefringence**
Acetate	1.478	1.477	0.001
Triacetate	1.472	1.471	0.001
Acrylic	1.524	1.520	0.004
Nylon			
Nylon 6	1.568	1.515	0.053
Nylon 6–6	1.582	1.519	0.063
Polyester			
Dacron	1.710	1.535	0.175
Kodel	1.642	1.540	0.102
Modacrylic	1.536	1.531	0.005
Rayon			
Cuprammonium rayon	1.552	1.520	0.032
Viscose rayon	1.544	1.520	0.024

Note: The listed values are for specific fibers, which explains the precise values given. In identification work, such precision is not practical; values within 0.02 or 0.03 of those listed will suffice.

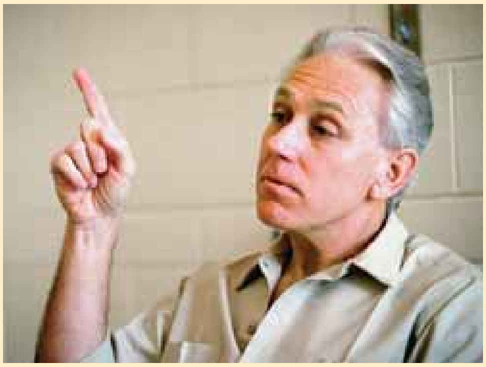
Significance of Fiber Evidence

Once a fiber match has been determined, the question of the significance of such a finding is bound to be raised. In reality, no analytical technique permits the criminalist to associate a fiber strand definitively to any single garment. Furthermore, except in the most unusual circumstances, no statistical databases are available for determining the probability of a fiber's origin. Considering the mass distribution of synthetic fibers and the constantly changing fashion tastes of our society, it is highly unlikely that such data will be available in the foreseeable future.

Despite these limitations, one should not discount or minimize the significance of a fiber association. An enormous variety of fibers exists in our

Forensics at Work

Fatal Vision Revisited



Jeffrey MacDonald in 1995 at Sheridan, Oregon, Federal Correctional Institution. *Courtesy AP Wide World Photos*

Dr. Jeffrey MacDonald was convicted in 1979 of murdering his wife and two young daughters. The events surrounding the crime and the subsequent trial were recounted in Joe McGinniss's best-selling book *Fatal Vision*. The focus of MacDonald's defense was that intruders entered his home and committed these violent acts. Eleven years after this conviction, MacDonald's attorneys filed a petition for a new trial, claiming the existence of "critical new" evidence.

The defense asserted that wig fibers found on a hairbrush in the MacDonald residence were evidence that an intruder dressed in a wig entered the MacDonald home on the day of the murder. Subsequent examination of this claim by the FBI

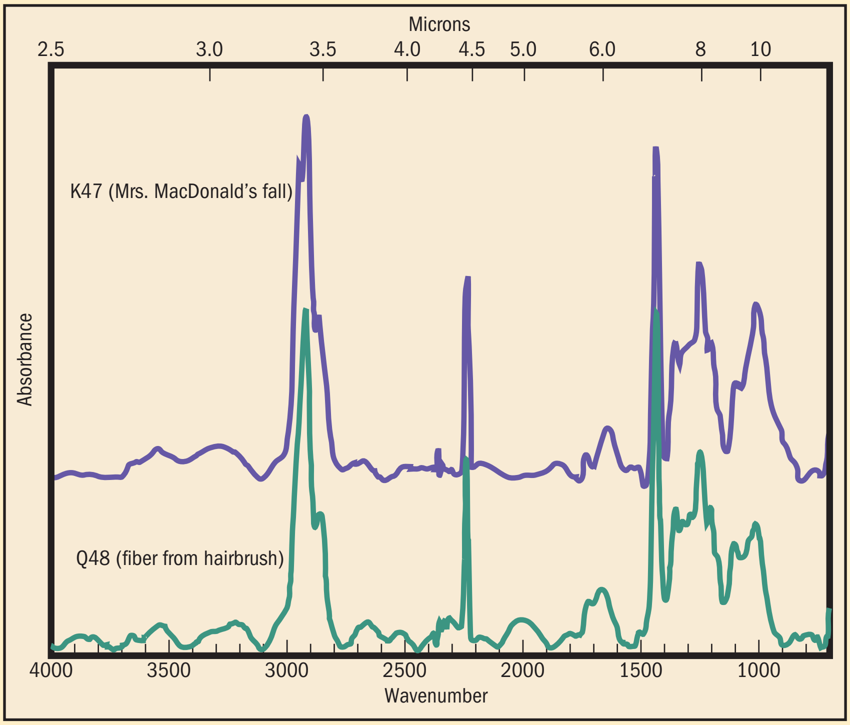


FIGURE 1 A fiber comparison made with an infrared spectrophotometer. The infrared spectrum of a fiber from Mrs. MacDonald's fall compares to a fiber recovered from a hairbrush in the MacDonald home. These fibers were identified as modacrylics, the most common type of synthetic fiber used in the manufacture of human hair goods. *Courtesy SA Michael Malone, FBI Laboratory, Washington, D.C.*

Source: B. M. Murtagh and M. P. Malone, "Fatal Vision Revisited," *Police Chief* (June 1993): 15.

(*continued*)

Forensics at Work

Fatal Vision Revisited (*continued*)

Laboratory focused on a blond fall (a type of artificial hair extension) frequently worn by MacDonald's wife. Fibers removed from the fall were shown to clearly match fibers on the hairbrush. The examination included the use of infrared microspectrophotometry to demonstrate that the suspect wig fibers were chemically identical to fibers found in the composition of the MacDonald fall (see Figure 1). Hence, although wig fibers were found at the crime scene, the source of these fibers could be accounted for—they came from Mrs. MacDonald's fall.

Another piece of evidence cited by MacDonald's lawyers was a bluish-black woolen fiber found on the body of Mrs. MacDonald. They claimed that this fiber compared to a bluish-black woolen fiber recovered from the club used to assault her. These wool fibers were central to MacDonald's defense that the "intruders" wore dark-colored clothing. Initial examination showed that the fibers were microscopically indistinguishable. However, the FBI also compared the two wool fibers by visible-light microspectrophotometry. Comparison of their spectra clearly showed that their dye compositions differed, providing no evidence of outside intruders (see Figure 2). Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court denied the merits of MacDonald's petition for a new trial.

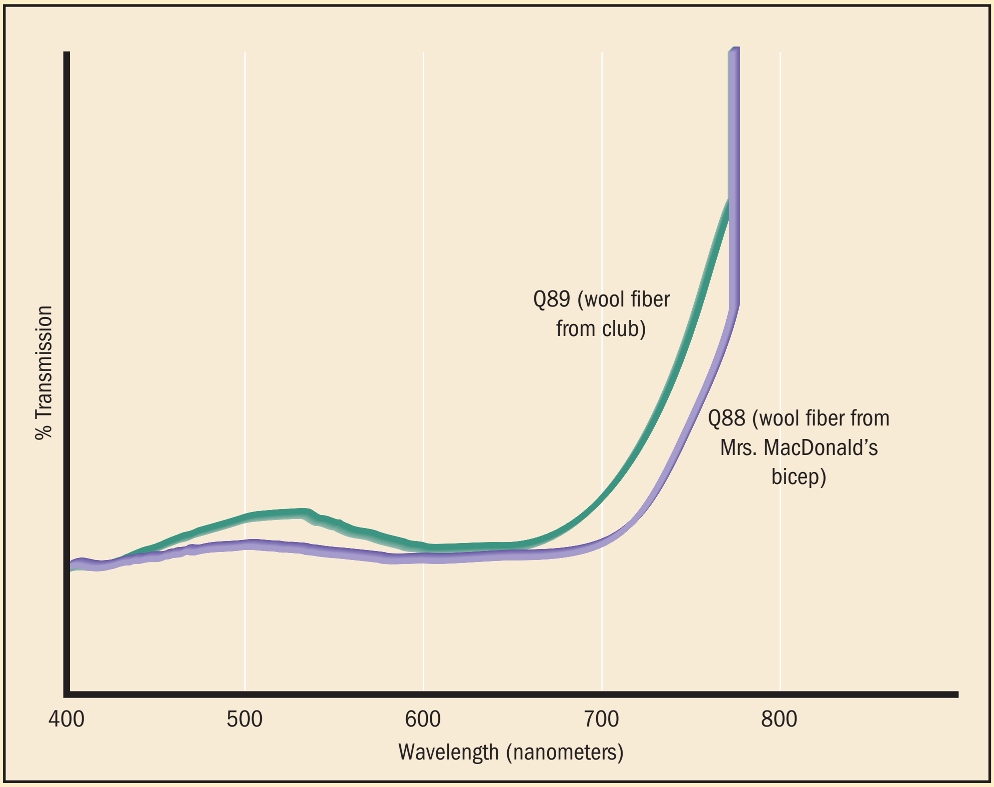


FIGURE 2 The visible-light spectrum for the woolen fiber recovered from Mrs. MacDonald's body is clearly different from that of the fiber recovered from the club used to assault her. *Courtesy SA Michael Malone, FBI Laboratory, Washington, D.C.*

society. By simply looking at the random individuals we meet every day, we can see how unlikely it is to find two different people wearing identically colored fabrics (with the exception of blue denims or white cottons). There are thousands of different-colored fibers in our environment. Combine this with the fact that forensic scientists compare not only the color of fibers but also their size, shape, microscopic appearance, chemical composition, and dye content, and one can now begin to appreciate how unlikely it is to find two indistinguishable colored fibers emanating from randomly selected sources.

Furthermore, the significance of a fiber association increases dramatically if the analyst can link two or more distinctly different fibers to the same object. Likewise, the associative value of fiber evidence is dramatically enhanced if it is accompanied by other types of physical evidence linking a person or object to a crime. As with most class evidence, the significance of a fiber comparison is dictated by the circumstances of the case; by the location, number, and nature of the fibers examined; and, most important, by the judgment of an experienced examiner.

Collection and Preservation of Fiber Evidence

As criminal investigators have become more aware of the potential contribution of trace physical evidence to the success of their investigations, they have placed greater emphasis on conducting thorough crime-scene searches for evidence of forensic value. Their skill and determination at carrying out these tasks is tested in the collection of fiber-related evidence. Fiber evidence can be associated with virtually any type of crime. It usually cannot be seen with the naked eye and thus easily can be overlooked by someone not specifically searching for it.

An investigator committed to optimizing the laboratory's chances for locating minute strands of fibers identifies and preserves potential "carriers" of fiber evidence. Relevant articles of clothing should be packaged carefully in paper bags. Each article must be placed in a separate bag to avoid cross-contamination of evidence. Scrupulous care must be taken to prevent articles of clothing from different people or from different locations from coming into contact. Such articles must not even be placed on the same surface prior to packaging. Likewise, carpets, rugs, and bedding are to be folded carefully to protect areas suspected of containing fibers. Car seats should be carefully covered with polyethylene sheets to protect fiber evidence, and knife blades should be covered to protect adhering fibers. If a body is thought to have been wrapped at one time in a blanket or carpet, adhesive tape lifts of exposed body areas may reveal fiber strands.

Occasionally the field investigator may need to remove a fiber from an object, particularly if loosely adhering fibrous material may be lost in transit to the laboratory. These fibers must be removed with a clean forceps and placed in a small sheet of paper, which, after folding and labeling, can be placed inside another container. Again, scrupulous care must be taken to prevent contact between fibers collected from different objects or from different locations.

In the laboratory, the search for fiber evidence on clothing and other relevant objects, as well as in debris, is time consuming and tedious, and will test the skill and patience of the examiner. The crime-scene investigator can manage this task by collecting only relevant items for examination. The crime-scene investigator must pinpoint areas where a likely transfer of fiber evidence occurred and then ensure proper collection and preservation of these materials.

Key Points

- Fibers may be classified into two broad groups: *natural* and *manufactured*.
- Most fibers currently manufactured are produced solely from synthetic chemicals and are therefore classified as *synthetic fibers*. They include nylons, polyesters, and acrylics.
- Microscopic comparisons between questioned and standard/reference fibers are initially undertaken for color and diameter characteristics. Other features that could be important in comparing fibers are striations on the surface of the fiber, the presence of delustering particles, and the cross-sectional shape of the fiber.
- The visible-light microspectrophotometer is a convenient way for analysts to compare the colors of fibers through spectral patterns.
- Infrared spectrophotometry and the polarizing microscope are reliable methods for identifying the chemical composition of fibers.
- Fiber evidence collected at each location should be placed in separate containers to avoid cross-contamination. Care must be taken to prevent articles of clothing from different people or from different locations from coming into contact.

Case Study

The Telltale Rabbit

On a cold winter's day . . . a female was found in the alleyway of an East Harlem tenement. Close to the body was a California florist flower box and a plastic liner. The victim was identified as a member of a well-known church who had been selling church literature in the buildings that surround the alley in which the body was discovered.

The detectives investigating the case forwarded the flower box, the plastic liner, and the victim's clothing to the forensic science laboratory. On the box and liner were found tan wool fibers, red acrylic fibers, and navy blue wool fibers (all identified by polarized light microscopy). The three types of questioned fibers were compared microscopically with the vicitm's clothing. All three were found to be consistent in all respects to the textile fibers composing the victim's clothing (tan wool overcoat, navy blue wool/polyester blend slacks, and red acrylic sweater), thereby associating the woman with the flower box and liner.

In addition, light blue nylon rug fibers and several brown rabbit hairs were found on the box and liner. Similar light blue nylon rug fibers and rabbit hairs, as well as red nylon rug fibers, were found on the victim's tan wool overcoat. Neither the rabbit hairs nor the nylon rug fibers could be associated with the victim's environment (her clothing or residence). All of this information was conveyed to the field investigators.

Upon further inquiry in the neighborhood, investigators learned the identity of a man who had, the day after the body was discovered, sold a full-length brown rabbit hair coat to a local man. The investigators obtained the rabbit hair coat from the purchaser. The hair composing the coat was compared microscopically to the questioned rabbit hairs found on the victim's wool coat and the flower box liner. The specimens of questioned rabbit hair were found to be consistent in all physical and microscopic characteristics to the rabbit hair composing the suspect's coat. Armed with this information, the police now had probable cause to obtain a search warrant for the suspect's apartment.

In the suspect's apartment two rugs were found. One was light blue and the other was red, both rugs were composed of nylon fibers. Samples of each rug were collected by the crime-scene unit and forwarded to the forensic science laboratory for comparison with the questioned rug fibers found on the victim's clothing, the flower box, and the plastic liner. The questioned and known rug fibers were found to be consistent in all respects. The presence of light blue nylon rug fibers, red nylon rug fibers, and brown-colored rabbit hairs on the flower box, plastic liner, and woman's clothing enabled the author to make associations between the woman, flower box, and liner found in the alleyway with the suspect and his apartment. . . .

The investigating officers made further inquiries in the neighborhood about the suspect. They located a witness who stated that he saw the suspect carrying a large California flower box a day or two before the body was discovered.

From the evidence, investigators theorized that the woman was killed in the suspect's apartment, placed in the flower box, brought up to the roof of the building in which the defendant resided, and thrown off the building into the alley below. On the basis of all of this evidence, the suspect was arrested, indicted, and tried for second-degree murder. After two trials, at which the author gave extensive testimony (three days) about the trace evidence, the defendant was found guilty of second-degree murder and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment.

Source: Reprinted in part by permission of the American Society of Testing and Materials from N. Petraco, "Trace Evidence—The Invisible Witness," *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 31 (1986): 321. Copyright 1986.

Chapter Summary

Hair is an appendage of the skin that grows out of an organ known as the hair follicle. The length of a hair extends from its root or bulb embedded in the follicle, continues into a shaft, and terminates at a tip end. The shaft, which is composed of three layers—the cuticle, cortex, and medulla—is most intensely examined by the forensic scientist. The comparison microscope is an indispensable tool for comparing these morphological characteristics.

When comparing strands of hair, the criminalist is particularly interested in matching the color, length, and diameter. A careful microscopic examination of hair reveals morphological features that can distinguish human hair from animal hair. Scale structure, medullary index, and medullary shape are particularly important in hair identification. Other important features for comparing hair are the presence or absence of a medulla and the distribution, shape, and color intensity of pigment granules in the cortex. Microscopic hair examinations tend to be subjective and highly dependent on the skills and integrity of the analyst.

Recent breakthroughs in DNA profiling have extended this technology to the individualization of human hair. The probability of detecting DNA in hair roots is more likely for hair being examined in its anagen or early growth phase as opposed to its catagen or telogen phases. Often when hair is forcibly removed a follicular tag, a translucent piece of tissue surrounding the hair's shaft near the root, may be present. This is a rich source of DNA associated with hair. Also, mitochondrial DNA can be extracted from the hair shaft. All positive microscopic hair comparisons must be confirmed by DNA analysis.

The quality of fiber evidence depends on the ability of the criminalist to identify the origin of the fiber or at least to narrow the possibilities to a limited number of sources. Microscopic comparisons between questioned and standard/reference fibers are initially undertaken for color and diameter characteristics. Other morphological features that could be important in comparing fibers are striations on the surface of the fiber, the presence of delustering particles, and the cross-sectional shape of the fiber.

The visible-light microspectrophotometer provides a convenient way to compare the colors of fibers through spectral patterns. Infrared spectrophotometry is a rapid and reliable tool for identifying the generic class of fibers, as is the polarizing microscope.

Review Questions

Facts and Concepts

1. What is hair and what organ produces it?

2. Name and briefly define the three layers of the hair shaft.

3. What two features make hair a good subject for establishing individual identity? To which layer of the hair shaft are much of these features attributed?

4. The scale pattern of the cuticle is an important feature for characterizing ___________ hair.

5. What is the main forensic importance of the cortex?
6. What is the difference between the medullae of human and animal hairs? Name one exception to this among humans.
7. Name the three phases of hair growth. A criminalist is more likely to collect DNA from hairs in which stage of growth? Why?
8. Why must microscopic human hair comparisons be undertaken with extreme caution?
9. In comparing hairs, what aspects of the hair is the criminalist particularly interested in matching? Name at least one other important feature that the criminalist might compare.
10. Which of the following questions cannot be answered with a microscopic examination of hair?
    a. whether a hair came from a 25-year-old or an infant
    b. whether a hair is from a man or a woman
    c. whether a hair is from a scalp or a beard
    d. whether the hair is consistent with Caucasian or Negroid hair
11. What types of hairs found at a crime scene are most likely to provide useful DNA evidence? Why?
12. Why must questioned hairs and standard/reference hairs being compared come from the same area of the body?
13. Hairs from which parts of the body are most often used for hair comparisons?
14. Why should the entire hair be collected when performing a hair comparison?
15. Define *polymer* and *monomer*. Why are polymers sometimes known as macromolecules?
16. Which of the following is not an example of a natural polymer?
    a. starch
    b. cellulose
    c. sugar
    d. proteins
17. What two morphological characteristics does a criminalist first compare when examining fibers with a microscope? What other features might be important in such a comparison?
18. Name two physical characteristics that frequently are used to identify fibers.
19. What analytical technique does a criminalist use to analyze the composition of the dye in a fiber?
20. Describe three analytical techniques for comparing the color of two fibers.

Application and Critical Thinking

1. Indicate the phase of growth of each of the following hairs:
    a. the root is club-shaped
    b. the hair has a follicular tag
    c. the root bulb is flame-shaped
    d. the root is elongated

2. A criminalist studying a dyed sample hair notices that the dyed color ends about 1.5 centimeters from the tip of the hair. Approximately how many weeks before the examination was the hair dyed? Explain your answer.

3. Following are descriptions of several hairs; based on these descriptions, indicate the likely race of the person from whom the hair originated:
   a. evenly distributed, fine pigmentation
   b. continuous medullation
   c. dense, uneven pigmentation
   d. wavy with a round cross-section

4. Criminalist Pete Evett is collecting fiber evidence from a murder scene. He notices fibers on the victim's shirt and trousers, so he places both of these items of clothing in a plastic bag. He also sees fibers on a sheet near the victim, so he balls up the sheet and places it in separate plastic bag. Noticing fibers adhering to the windowsill from which the attacker gained entrance, Pete carefully removes it with his fingers and places it in a regular envelope. What mistakes, if any, did Pete make while collecting this evidence?

Virtual Crime Scenes

WebExtra 10.2
Virtual Crime Scene 10.1
www.prenhall.com/hsforensics

WebExtra 10.3
Virtual Crime Scene 10.2
www.prenhall.com/hsforensics

Crime Scene 10.1
Step into the role of the first officer responding to a violent crime scene
www.prenhall.com/hsforensics

Crime Scene 10.2
Assume the duties of an evidence-collection technician at a violent crime scene
www.prenhall.com/hsforensics

Web Resources

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Trace Evidence (Online article discussing the analysis of hair and fiber evidence based on true crime stories)
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Endnotes

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