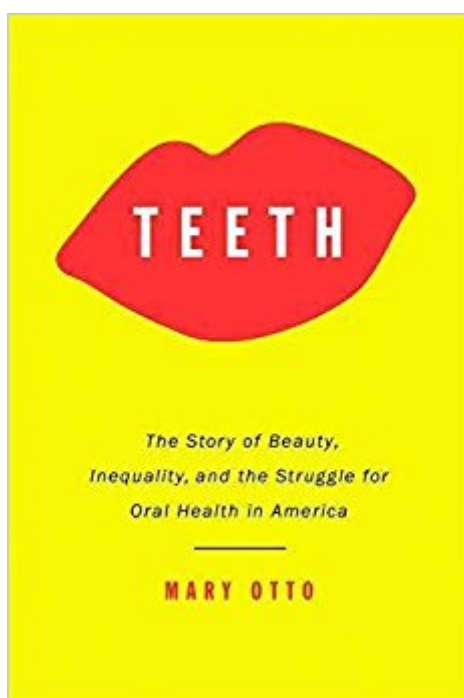


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# Teeth: The Story Of Beauty, Inequality, And The Struggle For Oral Health In America



## Synopsis

"[Teeth is] more than an exploration of a two-tiered system—it is a call for sweeping, radical change."—New York Times Book Review  
"Show me your teeth," the great naturalist Georges Cuvier is credited with saying, "and I will tell you who you are." In this shattering new work, veteran health journalist Mary Otto looks inside America's mouth, revealing unsettling truths about our unequal society. Teeth takes readers on a disturbing journey into America's silent epidemic of oral disease, exposing the hidden connections between tooth decay and stunted job prospects, low educational achievement, social mobility, and the troubling state of our public health. Otto's subjects include the pioneering dentist who made Shirley Temple and Judy Garland's teeth sparkle on the silver screen and helped create the all-American image of "pearly whites"; Deamonte Driver, the young Maryland boy whose tragic death from an abscessed tooth sparked congressional hearings; and a marketing guru who offers advice to dentists on how to push new and expensive treatments and how to keep Medicaid patients at bay. In one of its most disturbing findings, Teeth reveals that toothaches are not an occasional inconvenience, but rather a chronic reality for millions of people, including disproportionate numbers of the elderly and people of color. Many people, Otto reveals, resort to prayer to counteract the uniquely devastating effects of dental pain. Otto also goes back in time to understand the roots of our predicament in the history of dentistry, showing how it became separated from mainstream medicine, despite a century of growing evidence that oral health and general bodily health are closely related. Muckraking and paradigm-shifting, Teeth exposes for the first time the extent and meaning of our oral health crisis. It joins the small shelf of books that change the way we view society and ourselves—and will spark an urgent conversation about why our teeth matter.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: The New Press (March 14, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1620971445

ISBN-13: 978-1620971444

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.1 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #21,972 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in Books > Medical Books > Administration & Medicine Economics > Health Policy #31 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Medicine #38 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Poverty

## Customer Reviews

Praise for *Teeth*: Winner of the Studs and Ida Terkel Prize "[Teeth is] . . . more than an exploration of a two-tiered system—it is a call for sweeping, radical change." #151;New York Times Book Review [Otto infuses] what could be a mundane topic with quirky history, heart-wrenching real-life stories, and prose that is . . . poetic . . . this harrowing book pulls at the heartstrings. It is a must-read for anyone who cares about public health policy." #151;Newsday "With many adults still uninsured, children's dental care far from universal, and the future of government-supported health care unclear, Otto's sobering report should not go unheeded." #151;Publishers Weekly "Otto's well-reported and important book will arouse concern over the fact that dental health, which is so essential to our well-being, gets such short shrift, and, hopefully, help instigate reform." #151;Booklist "An astute examination of the complex, insular business of oral health care." #151;Kirkus Reviews "Mary Otto hits us right in the face; our teeth; with this important book. The lack of dental care for millions of Americans is a national shame. *Teeth* breaks new ground in the canon of books about poverty. It should be read by anyone concerned about the class divide in the U.S." #151;Dale Maharidge, author of *And Their Children After Them*, winner of the 1990 nonfiction Pulitzer Prize "I can't remember the last time I read a book that so brilliantly yokes physiological, political and cultural systems. Rife with discovery, and a spur to social action, Mary Otto's book is a beautifully readable and essential testament for these times." #151;Mary Cappello, author of *Swallow: Foreign Bodies, Their Ingestion, Inspiration, and the Curious Doctor who Extracted Them* "Mary Otto brings history, policy and painful personal realities together in this compelling and engaging book about our nation's highly preventable epidemic of oral disease. *Teeth* should be read by every policy maker and health professional who believes we can and must act to reduce the current barriers to dental care." #151;Louis W. Sullivan, MD, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, 1989-1993, and chairman of the Sullivan Alliance to Transform the Health Professions "Who eats too much sugar, leading to dental trauma? Primarily the poor. Who cannot sleep because of continuing dental pain and no available dental care? Primarily the poor. Even with Medicare and Medicaid, dental care has remained a stepchild; and these programs

are in jeopardy now. "The teeth are no match for . . . a life of poverty," Otto says. More teeth failure and its consequences are on their way." Peter Edelman "Here's a book that will enlighten you, upset you, and give you hope. I highly recommend it." Bob Herbert, Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos and former Op-Ed columnist for the New York Times "Mesmerizing and important. Mary Otto's unflinching work on the miserable state of oral health in America gnaws at you like a toothache." Congressman Jamie Raskin (MD-8)

Mary Otto is the oral health topic leader for the Association of Health Care Journalists. She began writing about oral health at the Washington Post, where she worked for eight years covering social issues including health care and poverty. She lives in Washington, D.C.

I learned so from this book---and a lot of it I hope people will realize the importance of. In TEETH author Mary Otto shares with us not just the importance of oral health but reminds us of taking advantage of the opportunities we have to care for our teeth---and gives examples of what happens to those who can't afford some of the things we take for granted. Of course I know that we should take care of our teeth, but what about those who don't have access to proper care or find themselves unable to care for them the way they should? The book shows us the serious consequences that can come from neglect and what happens when the proper care is not available. A real wake-up call for us all as to why we should be concerned with more than how straight and white our teeth are, this book shows us that there are important reasons as to why we should care about the health of our teeth.

This is a must read for anyone working in oral health

As a dentist at times I felt that many of the solutions to the issues were not sustainable or even feasible but a good overall picture of the issues we face as a dental community and nationally. 4.5 stars. Sometimes it takes an outsider looking in to fix an issue. Health care in this country is not perfect and dental is the same. Hopefully a solution is not far on the horizon.

A must read for pre-dental students

Insightful. Revealing. Explains a lot about the system in which we find ourselves.

Incredible book! Extremely well written!

Great book with captivating facts about dental organizations and oral health in our country. A good read for anyone.

Mary Otto has been involved in the tragic death of Deamonte Driver due to dental infection for several years. She deserves enormous credit for bringing this story to the public. In her new book, "Teeth," Ms. Otto takes her formidable investigative skills and applies them across an accurate, and interesting account of the founding of the dental profession, and on why it was never integrated into medicine. Most importantly, she unearths the many sad tales on the inadequate resources allocated for dental services in the USA. At a time when it has become clear that dental disease, especially periodontal disease, is a contributory cause to many inflammatory based systemic diseases like diabetes, stroke, heart disease and renal disease, it is important to read this book. Indeed, it has been estimated that providing dental care within Medicare can generate a net savings of \$12 billion per year from reduced hospitalizations due to the impact of reducing a key source of inflammation in the body.

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