Bacterial richness in public tap water and sinks of San Francisco’s public Pit Stop bathrooms

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# Introduction

Throughout the world and including the United States, there are numerous individuals that are deprived of safe and reliable tap water. Cities like Newark, New Jersey and Flint, Michigan are only some examples of the water crisis in the United States (Pace et al. 2022). In California, there is a small percentage of public tap water systems that have been found to be in violation at least one point in their time since 2012 (Reese 2018). Further studies have revealed that water system violations in California transpire in low-income communities, where there are limited resources which makes it difficult to meet the standards, driving the inequitable access to safe tap water (Balazs et al. 2012, Balazs and Ray 2014). Besides access to safe public water, public restrooms are a necessity as well. They provide service to a mobile population and assists the individuals with greater needs (children, elderly, the homeless, etc.) (Stanwell-Smith 2010). In addition, public restrooms in high-income locations are known to display cleaner facilities and conditions compared to the restrooms in low and medium-income areas (Suen et al. 2019).

In this study, I focused on the bacterial richness in public tap water of San Francisco’s public restrooms (Pit Stop bathrooms) and how they vary regarding population density and the average neighborhood income. Additionally, I tested the pH levels between Outer Richmond’s Lake Stow and Lakeshore’s Lake Merced to investigate the pH levels between the lakes with differing green space. The study revolves around the use of field collected data across several districts of San Francisco and the use of pre-existing datasets relating to the study of different urban systems. The field collected data consisted of tap water samples of Pit Stop bathrooms along with swab samples of several locations on the sink in the same bathrooms. The publicly-available datasets consisted of information pertaining to San Francisco’s average income values along with San Francisco’s census data.

# Materials and Methods

## Location and Pit Stop Restrooms

As a class group, we decided which districts of San Francisco we wanted to study based on an official San Francisco district map. We concluded to observing Haight (HA), Marina (MA), Outer Richmond (OR), Civic Center (CC), Mission (MI), Bayview (BA), and Lakeshore (LA). We used Professor Zimmerman’s R code that randomly plotted points within a neighborhood to determine the exact position we should stop at via bus services.

Pit Stop bathrooms were the main public bathrooms studied and sampled. In neighborhoods where there were two Pit Stop bathrooms in close proximity to the predetermined bus stop, I sampled both bathrooms (B1 & B2), otherwise, I only sampled a single bathroom. San Francisco Public Work’s Pit Stop program supplies the public with safe and sanitized restrooms. Outside or near each unit contains used-needle disposals, animal waste stations, and a regular trash disposal. Inside each restroom contains a hands-free sink, soap, paper towels, toilet, and toilet paper. In addition, each unit gets automatically cleaned after each use and will get manually cleaned by a staff member periodically. Currently, there are 33 Pit Stop locations across 13 neighborhoods. The program utilizes street-cleaning data which determines the placement of each Pit Stops, placing the public restrooms where they are essential (Works 2014). There were some neighborhoods that did not contain a Pit Stop bathroom, in which case, I just found the nearest public restroom, which was often near or in public parks. It’s also important to note that these non Pit Stop restrooms contained bathroom facilities with both Men and Women options. In those cases, I sampled the Men’s side (B2) and I would have my female-identifying peer to assist in collecting my samples for the Women’s side (B1).

## TSA plates

The TSA plates used were prepared using 40g/L of tryptic soy agar and placed into an autoclavable glassware. Then, the addition of distilled and deionized water was added until the desired volume was reached. Once reached, the glasswared was autoclaved at 121°C for 30 minutes on liquid cycle. When it was ready, the product was poured into 100mm petri dishes to cool and stored in a closed bag at 4°C until eventually used.

## Tubes and Swabbing

For the data collection, I used 15mL falcon or centrifuge tubes containing 0.75mL phosphate buffered saline (PBS) 1x pH 7.4 which was autoclaved for 30 minutes at 121°C liquid cycle. Inside a Pit Stop bathroom, I used sterile cotton swabs which I would first dip into the PBS filled centrifuge tubes prior to swabbing three locations on the sink: the area around the spout (s1), the drain (s2), and the handle/arm rest area (s3). I would swab for 3-4 seconds and I would immediately place the swab back into its respective tube. For the negative control (c/control), I simply mimicked the same actions when swabbing the sink, but I simply swabbed the air with the same amount of time. For the water (w), I took an empty centrifuge tube without PBS and took a water sample from the automatic sink. For each Pit Stop unit, I had a total of 5 centrifuge tubes: the 3 sink samples, 1 control sample, and 1 water sample.

## Plating and Counting

Once I returned from the sample sites with my centrifuge tubes, I vortexed each centrifuge tube for 30-40 seconds. After vortexing, each tube sample (except the water sample) is aliquoted onto its respective TSA plate with a value of 0.075mL. The water sample is aliquoted with the same value of 0.075mL onto a TSA plate, but with 3 technical replicates. Per restroom, there are 7 total plates: 3 plates for the sink samples, 3 plates for the water sample, and 1 plate for the control. Once the samples are plated, approximately 7-12 sterilized glass beads are poured into the plates and each plate is shaken for 15-20 seconds or until the sample on the plate has adequately spread across the area. Once each plate has been thoroughly shaken and spread, the plates are incubated at around 37°C for 5 days.

After the incubation period, the plates are taken out for observation. Each plate is carefully observed and recorded for bacterial richness. I documented the morphology type of each bacteria, the count of each morphology type on the plate, and the overall total bacterial count present on each plate. After each plate is carefully studied and documented, the plate is properly discarded.

## Site Locations and Descriptions

Add text here.

## Field Sampling Design

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## Data Analysis and Statistics

Add text here.

# Results

## Subsections are ok in the results section too

Add a number of code chunks in the Results section. These should read in, subset and plot the data as needed (no need to save any figures to pdf, since they will be put into the rendered document when you click ‘knit’), and, for any hypotheses that you want to test, an appropriate statistical test.

# If you add any additional packages here, make sure they are  
# also listed in the DESCRIPTION file  
library("dplyr")

##   
## Attaching package: 'dplyr'

## The following objects are masked from 'package:stats':  
##   
## filter, lag

## The following objects are masked from 'package:base':  
##   
## intersect, setdiff, setequal, union

library("tidyr")  
library("ggplot2")  
library("readr")

# Discussion

# Sources Cited

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Pace, C., C. Balazs, K. Bangia, N. Depsky, A. Renteria, R. Morello-Frosch, and L. J. Cushing. 2022. [Inequities in drinking water quality among domestic well communities and community water systems, california, 2011‒2019](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306561). American Journal of Public Health 112:88–97.

Reese, P. 2018. Does your water district fail to comply with drinking water standards. Sacramento Bee.

Stanwell-Smith, R. 2010. [Public toilets down the drain? Why privies are a public health concern](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2010.07.002). Public Health 124:613–616.

Suen, L. K., G. K. Siu, Y. P. Guo, S. K. Yeung, K. Y. Lo, and M. O’Donoghue. 2019. The public washroom-friend or foe? An observational study of washroom cleanliness combined with microbiological investigation of hand hygiene facilities. Antimicrobial Resistance & Infection Control 8:1–6.

Works, S. F. P. 2014. San francisco pit stop.