Use of Antibiotic Resistance Analysis for Representativeness Testing of Multiwatershed Libraries

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Received 14 November 2002/Accepted 19 March 2003

The use of antibiotic resistance analysis (ARA) for microbial source tracking requires the generation of a library of isolates collected from known sources in the watershed. The size and composition of the library are critical in determining if it represents the diversity of patterns found in the watershed. This study was performed to determine the size that an ARA library needs to be to be representative of the watersheds for which it will be used and to determine if libraries from different watersheds can be merged to create multiwatershed libraries. Fecal samples from known human, domesticated, and wild animal sources were collected from six Virginia watersheds. From these samples, enterococci were isolated and tested by ARA. Based on cross-validation discriminant analysis, only the largest of the libraries (2,931 isolates) were found to be able to classify nonlibrary isolates as well as library isolates (i.e., were representative). Small libraries tended to have higher average rates of correct classification, but were much less able to correctly classify nonlibrary isolates. A merged multiwatershed library (6,587 isolates) was created and was found to be large enough to be representative of the isolates from the contributing watersheds. When isolates that were collected from the contributing watersheds approximately 1 year later were analyzed with the multiwatershed library, they were classified as well as the isolates in the library, suggesting that the resistance patterns are temporally stable for at least 1 year. The ability to obtain a representative, temporally stable library demonstrates that ARA can be used to identify sources of fecal pollution in natural waters.

The contamination of streams, rivers, and estuaries with untreated fecal material from nonpoint sources continues to be a major environmental problem. Nonpoint source fecal pollution can contain high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus, which contribute to eutrophication. Pollution from fecal sources can also contain pathogenic bacteria, protozoa, and viruses, which can contribute to an increased public health risk. Although methods of quantifying the amount of fecal pollution in natural waters are well established, there is a critical need for the development of methods for the identification of the sources of the pollution to facilitate the remediation of the polluted waters.

Several methods of source tracking methods have been proposed, and the strengths and weaknesses of these methods have been recently reviewed (27, 30). Some methods detect source-specific indicators such as viruses and bacteriophages (3, 4, 18, 21, 26), Bacteroides (1, 2), bifidobacteria (1, 25), endospore-formers (9), and Enterococcus (32). Other methods rely on detecting differences among populations of Escherichia coli and enterococci found in different sources. These methods, which require the generation of a “library” of patterns from bacteria from known sources, include genotypic methods such as ribotyping (6, 8, 16, 24), pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (22, 28, 29, 31), amplified fragment length polymorphism (13, 31), 16S rRNA sequencing (13), and PCR-based methods, such as randomly amplified polymorphic DNA (RAPD) (31) and rep-PCR (7). Phenotypic library-based methods have also been developed, such as those that measure differences in carbon-source utilization patterns (15) and resistance to antibiotics. Differences in antibiotic resistance among bacteria from various potential fecal sources have been measured by the multiple antibiotic resistance method, which uses single concentrations of each drug (13, 19, 23), and by antibiotic resistance analysis (ARA), which uses multiple concentrations of each antibiotic (5, 12, 14, 17, 20, 33–35).

For all library-based methods, the size and composition of the library are critical for accurate and reliable source determination. In order for a library to reliably identify fecal sources, it needs to be representative of the sources that are present in the watersheds (i.e., it should contain examples of all of the patterns found in the bacteria from each of the source types that are found in the watershed). Additionally, an ideal library should be representative enough to be able to classify fecal isolates from other geographic areas and should be stable over time so that new libraries do not need to be continually created. Our laboratory has focused on using ARA for source identification and has created libraries of enterococci from six Virginia watersheds. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the size of ARA libraries and their representativeness and to determine if libraries from different watersheds can be merged to create multiwatershed libraries that are geographically representative and temporally stable.
in the Long Glade library were randomly selected. Three sublibraries were created from the six individual libraries. A multiwatershed merged library was created by combining the isolates from each of the six individual libraries. For testing the ability to grow in the presence of each concentration of an antibiotic, were classified by discriminant analysis by the DISCRIM procedure of SAS (prior probabilities, equal; covariance matrix, pooled). Within each sample, only isolates with unique resistance patterns were analyzed. Isolates with identical patterns were discarded by using the NODUPRECS option of the SORT procedure. The average rate of correct classification (ARCC) of the various libraries, sublibraries, and sets of held-out isolates was computed by averaging the percentages of correctly classified isolates for each source (35). Additionally, the rates of misclassification were calculated. To determine the extent of misclassification of isolates from other sources into a given source type, the percentages of each of the other source types that were misclassified as that type were averaged. This value was termed the “minimum detectable percentage” (MDP). Thus, if a source is found at levels above the MDP, it can be reasonably assumed that this is not the result of misclassification of other sources and therefore is present in the watershed.

**Table 1. Watershed characteristics**

| Watershed           | Duration of sampling (mo/yr) | Land use | Location (Va county) | Drainage (river) | Size (acres) |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Thumb Run           | 7/01–9/01                     | Rural, wooded | Fauquier            | Rappahannock     | 23,123       |
| Goose Creek         | 12/01–5/02                    | Rural, wooded | Loudon and Fauquier | Potomac          | 247,921      |
| Blacks Run          | 6/99–12/00                    | Urban, rural | Rockingham          | North            | 1,253        |
| Moores Creek        | 6/00–3/01                     | Urban, rural | Albemarle           | Rivanna          | 22,348       |
| Holmans Creek       | 7/99–5/01                     | Rural     | Shenandoah          | Shenandoah       | 11,990       |
| Long Glade Creek    | 5/01–12/01                    | Rural     | Augusta             | North            | 11,871       |

**Table 2. Numbers of samples collected over the duration of the study from each of the sources in each of the libraries and numbers of unique isolates* obtained from those samples**

| Library            | Type of sample | Total |
|--------------------|----------------|-------|
|                    | Human          | Domesticated | Wild | Total |
|                    | No. of samples | No. of unique isolates | No. of samples | No. of unique isolates | No. of samples | No. of unique isolates | No. of samples | No. of unique isolates |
| Thumb Run          | 11             | 100          | 17    | 129   | 20    | 165          | 48    | 394          |
| Goose Creek        | 12             | 91           | 35    | 224   | 21    | 153          | 68    | 468          |
| Blacks Run         | 11             | 172          | 12    | 57    | 27    | 356          | 50    | 685          |
| Moores Creek       | 9              | 121          | 59    | 606   | 19    | 150          | 87    | 877          |
| Holmans Creek      | 42             | 518          | 45    | 625   | 9     | 89           | 96    | 1,232        |
| Long Glade Creek   | 111            | 968          | 191   | 1,604 | 47    | 359          | 349   | 2,931        |
| Merged (all 6)     | 196            | 1,970        | 359   | 3,345 | 143   | 1,272        | 698   | 6,587        |

* Isolates from a given sample with unique antibiotic resistance patterns.
RESULTS

Classification of the known isolates was performed for each library. When resubstitution analysis was used, the ARCCs ranged from 65 to 81% (Table 3). The ARCC of the merged library (57%) was lower than those of any of the individual libraries. Human isolates were generally classified the best, with domesticated and wild isolates classified approximately equally well. Cross-validation of these libraries by the pulled-isolate method resulted in slightly lower ARCCs (Table 4), with the differences between the two methods ranging from 2% for the Moores Creek and Long Glade libraries up to 8% for the Goose Creek library. The ARCC of the merged library did not change when analyzed by the pulled-isolate method. When pulled-sample cross-validation analyses were performed, there was a more marked reduction in ARCCs (Table 5). The differences between this method and the resubstitution analyses were large for most of the libraries (ranging from 8 to 24%), but were much smaller for the largest library (Long Glade Creek) and for the merged library (4 and 3%, respectively).

One way to estimate the representativeness of a library is to determine how well isolates obtained from new samples from the watershed are classified compared to how well library isolates from that source are classified. If isolates from new samples (nonlibrary isolates) from a given source are classified (on average) as well as the isolates from that source that are in the library, then the library can be considered representative for that source. The testing of new isolates can be simulated by cross-validation analyses (which remove isolates from the library and then classify them). If just one isolate per sample had been used to construct the library, the pulled-isolate method of cross-validation (which classifies each isolate based on a library from which it has been removed) would be a good method to use. However, because the libraries in this study contain multiple isolates from the same sample, the pulled-isolate method may not give a true measure of representativeness, because the similarity of isolates within samples may be greater than the similarity between samples. Therefore, the pulled-isolate method is inappropriate because it may overestimate representativeness. The pulled-sample cross-validation analysis avoids this problem by removing all of the isolates from each sample and then classifying them against the remaining isolates, thus simulating the testing of a set of multiple isolates from a new sample. Thus, by comparing the difference between the ARCC of the resubstitution analysis (which classifies each isolate based on a library containing all of the isolates) and the ARCC of the pulled-sample analysis (which classifies each isolate based on a library from which the isolates from its own sample have been removed), the representativeness of a library can be estimated. If the difference is small (less than 5%), then the library can be considered representative (i.e., new isolates are classified almost as well as isolates in the library). Based on this criterion, only the large libraries (Long Glade and the merged library) can be considered representative of the sources of enterococci.

Another way to estimate the representativeness of a library is to hold out a portion of the isolates from an existing library

| Watershed        | % of isolates correctly classified as: | ARCC |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|------|
|                  | Human | Domesticated | Wild |     |
| Thumb Run        | 80    | 69           | 75   | 75  |
| Goose Creek      | 67    | 59           | 67   | 65  |
| Blacks Run       | 85    | 76           | 82   | 81  |
| Moores Creek     | 70    | 76           | 69   | 72  |
| Holmes Creek     | 67    | 64           | 80   | 70  |
| Long Glade Creek | 67    | 65           | 62   | 65  |
| Merged (all 6)   | 63    | 54           | 55   | 57  |

| Watershed        | % of isolates correctly classified as: | ARCC |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|------|
|                  | Human | Domesticated | Wild |     |
| Thumb Run        | 77    | 63           | 72   | 70  |
| Goose Creek      | 54    | 54           | 65   | 57  |
| Blacks Run       | 82    | 69           | 78   | 77  |
| Moores Creek     | 68    | 75           | 67   | 70  |
| Holmes Creek     | 64    | 62           | 73   | 66  |
| Long Glade Creek | 66    | 64           | 60   | 63  |
| Merged (all 6)   | 62    | 54           | 55   | 57  |

| Watershed        | % of isolates correctly classified as: | ARCC |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|------|
|                  | Human | Domesticated | Wild |     |
| Thumb Run        | 73    | 49           | 58   | 60  |
| Goose Creek      | 45    | 44           | 58   | 49  |
| Blacks Run       | 74    | 55           | 66   | 65  |
| Moores Creek     | 61    | 71           | 59   | 64  |
| Holmes Creek     | 54    | 55           | 29   | 46  |
| Long Glade Creek | 65    | 61           | 58   | 61  |
| Merged (all 6)   | 61    | 52           | 50   | 54  |
and then classify them by using the sublibrary that contains the remaining isolates. As with the cross-validation analyses, if these held-out isolates are classified (on average) as well as the isolates in the sublibrary, then the entire library can be considered representative. When various sizes of randomly selected sublibraries of the Long Glade library were created, the smallest libraries had the highest ARCCs, but were the poorest in classifying the held-out isolates (Fig. 1). For example, the smallest Long Glade sublibrary (5% of the full library) had an ARCC of 85%, but when the held-out isolates (the remaining 95% of the full library) were classified based on this small library, they were correctly classified at an average rate of just 48%. As the size of the sublibraries increased, the difference decreased. The held-out isolates were correctly classified about as well as the sublibrary isolates at sizes of about 80% of the full library. Thus, approximately 2,300 isolates were required to produce a representative library.

Because of the large number of isolates that are required for representativeness, it may be impractical to collect enough isolates from a single watershed. However, if the resistance patterns of isolates from different watersheds are similar, several smaller libraries could be combined to produce a larger, more representative multiwatershed library. To determine the similarity of the six libraries to each other, the isolates from each of the libraries were classified by using each of the other five libraries (Fig. 2). The average of the differences between the pulled-sample ARCC and the ARCC of each library classified against each of the other five libraries was 14%.

To determine how well the isolates from each library would be classified by a larger, more representative library, each of the libraries was classified by using a library comprising the other five libraries combined (i.e., the merged library with the individual library removed). Several of the individual libraries were classified nearly as well against the other five libraries combined as they were against themselves (by the pulled-sample method) (Fig. 2). The average of these differences was 9%. The difference probably results from the lack of representativeness of several of the smaller libraries, as well as some geographical differences between the watersheds. However, the previously demonstrated representativeness of the merged six-watershed library suggests that the resistance patterns do not vary greatly over the geographical range of these watersheds (northern and central Virginia).

As a further test of the geographic range of the merged library, samples from known sources from south Florida and from southwestern Virginia were tested in our laboratory and then classified by the merged library. In general, classification of the isolates from these geographical validation samples was lower than the ARCC of the merged library, with correct classification of just 45% of Florida human isolates and 37% of Florida domesticated isolates (Table 6). The classification of southwest Virginia isolates was varied, with human isolates being classified better than the isolates in the library (71% compared to 61%), but with domesticated isolates classified much worse (18% compared to 52%).

If the merged library is to be most useful, the resistance patterns should be stable over time. To determine how stable the resistance patterns are, additional samples from three of the watersheds were collected approximately 1 year after the original library was collected. When compared to the original Moores Creek library, the isolates from these temporal validation samples from Moores Creek were classified worse than the isolates in the library (with an average correct classification rate of just 47%) (Table 6). However, when the merged library was used, they were classified at a higher rate (average = 60%). Similarly, the temporal validation isolates from Holmans Creek were classified better by using the merged library (average =65%) than by using just the Holmans library (average = 48%). Long Glade Creek temporal validation isolates were classified better than the isolates in the library (84%) by using both the Long Glade library and the merged library. On average, all three sets of temporal validation isolates were classified better than the isolates from the merged library.
demonstrating that the patterns are temporally stable over a period of 1 year.

Given that the merged library is representative and is temporally stable, this would be the library of choice for the identification of unknown isolates. Although the ARCC of the library (Table 7) is 57%, it can still provide useful information, because the classification success rate is well above the rate that would be produced by random classification (33%). For this analysis, the expected frequencies of misclassification for human, domesticated, and wild sources were 20, 22, and 22%, respectively. The average rate at which the entire library was misclassified was 21% ± 1% (mean ± standard deviation), which resulted in an MDP of 25%. Thus, if an average of more than 25% of a particular source type is detected in a watershed, it can be reasonably assumed that it is a true source and not just a result of misclassification of the other source types.

### DISCUSSION

The representativeness of the libraries was tested by several techniques. If multiple isolates are included from each sample, the pulled-isolate method does not give a true measure of representativeness, because the similarity of isolates within samples is greater than the similarity between samples. Therefore, the pulled-sample method, even though it is harder to perform, is a better measure of representativeness. By using the pulled-sample method, it is clear that larger libraries are more representative. Both the Long Glade Creek library and the 6,500-isolate merged library show approximately equal classification success when isolates from a nonlibrary sample (one that has been pulled out) are classified and thus are representative. At least 2,300 of the isolates in the Long Glade library were required for it to be representative, which suggests that this is the magnitude of a minimum size for a representative library. Unfortunately, these larger libraries also have the lowest ARCCs. This lowered classification success of the larger libraries probably results from variability in the resistance patterns of the isolates within each source type in the watersheds. In other words, the more isolates of each source type that are contained in the library (i.e., the more representative it is), the greater the chance they will vary in their resistance patterns, which would thus result in lower classification success. If there is variability in the patterns in a watershed, then the ARCC of a small library could be misleading, because it would be unable to classify the large number of unknown isolates that have a pattern that is not included in it. Thus, it is unwise to rely only on the ARCC of a library without also knowing its representativeness.

The levels of classification of the temporal validation isolates are encouraging for maintaining a merged library over the period of 1 year. Although the long-term usefulness of ARA libraries has yet to be demonstrated, many source tracking studies are conducted over the course of a single year, so the

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### TABLE 6. Classification of known geographic validation isolates collected from different watersheds and of known temporal validation isolates collected from the same watershed approximately 1 year after the library had been completed

| Type of isolate by watershed/region | Source type | No. of isolates (samples) | % Correct by: |
|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------|
|                                    |             |                           | Individual library | Merged library |
| Temporal validation                |             |                           |               |
| Moores Creek                       | Human       | 11 (1)                    | 27            | 64            |
|                                   | Domesticated| 24 (3)                    | 75            | 79            |
|                                   | Wild        | 8 (1)                     | 38            | 38            |
|                                   | Average     | 47                        | 60            |               |
| Holmans Creek                      | Human       | 25 (4)                    | 60            | 52            |
|                                    | Domesticated| 64 (2)                    | 45            | 64            |
|                                    | Wild        | 5 (1)                     | 40            | 80            |
|                                   | Average     | 48                        | 65            |               |
| Long Glade Creek                   | Domesticated| 49 (6)                    | 84            | 84            |
| Geographic validation              |             |                           |               |
| South Florida (Hillsborough County)| Human       | 69 (5)                    | 45            |               |
|                                   | Domesticated| 62 (13)                   | 37            |               |
|                                   | Average     | 41                        |               |               |
| Southwest Virginia (Franklin and Montgomery Counties) | Human | 41 (4) | 71 |
|                                    | Domesticated| 153 (8)                   | 18            |               |
|                                    | Wild        | 43 (3)                    | 53            |               |
|                                   | Average     | 47                        |               |               |

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### TABLE 7. Classification of 6,587 isolates of enterococci from known human, domesticated, and wild sources in six Virginia watersheds

| Source (n) | No. (%) of isolates classified as: |
|------------|-----------------------------------|
|            | Human    | Domesticated | Wild |
| Human (1,970) | 1,228 (63) | 381 (19) | 361 (18) |
| Domesticated (3,345) | 659 (20) | 1,813 (54) | 873 (26) |
| Wild (1,272) | 262 (21) | 305 (24) | 705 (55) |

* The ARCC for this analysis is 57%, and the MDP is 25%.
temporal stability that we observed for this library would be sufficient for these studies. Because the creation of a representative library requires considerable effort, it would be desirable to have long-term temporal stability. To determine this, we are continuing to monitor the resistance patterns in the Holmans to have long-term temporal stability. To determine this, we are tentative library requires considerable effort, it would be desirable temporal stability that we observed for this library would be

The ARCCs for the six libraries, especially those of the large Long Glade Creek library and the merged library, are generally lower than the values obtained in previous studies. However, for the watersheds presented here, only unique isolates have been included in the analyses. The presence of duplicate isolates can artificially raise the ARCC by the inclusion of more similar patterns of each source type. Thus, the ARCCs in this paper are more truly indicative of the actual classification abilities of ARA. Also, the Long Glade and merged libraries are larger than previously published libraries, and larger libraries have lower ARCCs. Because ARA is rapid and inexpensive, however, large numbers of unknown isolates can be tested, which can overcome the lower ARCC. Even with an ARCC of 57% and an MDP of 25%, the merged library can be useful for source tracking studies. Often, only the major source(s) of fecal pollution will need to be identified for these studies, and this library can reliably identify sources that are present at average levels above 25%.

The ability of ARA to differentiate among the different source types demonstrates the validity of our working hypothesis that differential antibiotic use selects for bacterial populations with different resistance patterns in animals of different sources. This is an advantage over other source tracking methods that do not rely on detecting a selectable difference. Many library-based methods look for overall genetic differences among the strains, but not for any specific difference. However, overall genetic differences may be hard to demonstrate because of the diverse (10; G. A. Dykes, Letter, Appl. Environ. Microbiol. 68:4698, 2002) and changeable (11) nature of the gut microbiota. One specific selectable difference between strains that is commonly proposed is that of adhesion or attachment to the intestinal wall. However, recent evidence shows that although strains of Lactobacillus that adhere to the mucosa of the gut wall are host specific, they are very different from the strains present in the feces (36). By relying on a selectable difference that is exogenously applied to the guts of the source animals, ARA can somewhat reduce the effects of the variation in gut composition.

In conclusion, jackknife analysis of multiple ARA libraries has shown that large libraries are required for representative-ness, that libraries from several watersheds can be merged to produce a library that is large enough to be representative, and that the resistance patterns within watersheds are stable over the span of 1 year. The ability to obtain a representative, temporally stable library demonstrates that ARA can be used to identify sources of fecal pollution in natural waters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank J. Herrick for critical reading of the manuscript and C. Hagedorn and J. Harwood for discussion and helpful comments. This work was supported by the James Madison University Department of Biology and by grants from the United States Department of Agriculture (no. 2001-35102-10790), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission, the Lord Fairfax Planning District Commission, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, and the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission.

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