Individuality, stability, and variability of the plaque microbiome

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Assessing possible sources of error in classification.

Considering that Actinomyces and Parascardovia share the same phylum, we hypothesized that sequences representing Actinomyces were erroneously classified as Parascardovia in Jiang et al.’s original analysis. In an effort to understand the source of the misclassification, we used NCBI’s BLAST blastn program (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) to query the entire data set of 359,565 raw, untrimmed reads against the SILVA database (SILVA 106; www.arb-silva.de), following the taxon-assignment methodology described in Jiang et al. (2015). Through this process we identified only six reads for which a match to Parascardovia was reported within the top 50 hits, of which the best Parascardovia match was 97% identity. Even for these six reads BLAST also reported a better match to a Scardovia sequence, as judged by bit score for all 6 sequences and as judged by percent identity for five out of the six sequences. We therefore conclude that there were very few or no legitimate Parascardovia reads in the dataset.

Another potential source of misclassification could have been the presence of sequences representing both Actinomyces and a Parascardovia-like taxon in the same OTU, which then came to be labeled as Parascardovia. We investigated whether the reference sequences for Actinomyces and Parascardovia were within 94% of one another. We used TaxMan (Brandt et al., 2012; www.ibi.vu.nl/programs/taxmanwww/) to trim the SILVA 108 database to the region targeted by the primers used in Jiang et al. (2015) and generated a distance matrix for these sequences using o-sequence-distances (part of the oligotyping pipeline, available at github.com/meren/oligotyping). We found no Parascardovia reference sequences with above 90% similarity to any Actinomyces reference sequences in the SILVA 108 database (Supplementary Image 2). Thus, misclassification could not be accounted for by similarity of Actinomyces and Parascardovia. We were unable to identify the exact source of the misclassification.