

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HEALTH AND
HYGIENE: A VIEW FROM SAN FRANCISCO

by

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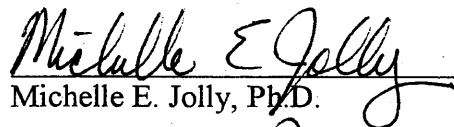
MASTER OF ARTS

in

Cultural Resources Management



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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:

The late nineteenth-century was a time of major change for urban American hygienic practices. While many studies have scrutinized infrastructure and historic documents about the culturally understood hygienic norms and expectations, it is unclear how households practiced hygiene relative to the publicly stated norm, or if their practices varied among similar households. Once more, studies in health and hygiene should not be ignored, because they reflect the individual, personal choices of specific people in the past. Individual voices, especially for everyday activities such as health and hygiene, are often silent to history, and yet by knowing how individuals acted under the cultural influences of their time, we can better understand the structure of society in the past, turn a critical eye to the present, and anticipate the impacts of cultural change in the future.

The purpose of this study is to determine, through the examination of consumer goods, the health and hygiene practices of different households and what impacts, if any, the presence of disease within the home had on this specific consumer behavior. Findings from these research themes will demonstrate the contribution studies like this can provide to our understanding of historic health, hygiene, and individual choice within the multitude of research avenues remaining.

Procedure:

This study has used a combination of historical data from documentary sources and archaeological data obtained from the San Francisco West Bay Approach and I-880 Cypress Freeway Replacement Projects. In addition, a literature search was conducted of 19th century American health and hygiene history, San Francisco's sanitation history, and archaeological studies in hygiene, health, consumption, households, and neighborhoods. Statistical calculations were made and quantitative data were compared.

Findings:

Contrary to expectations, the nuclear household had the highest range of variance in the consumption of health and hygiene products, but as predicted, households in the expansion phase adhered more strictly to a normal range of variability than those in the later phases. As far as impacts of disease within the home on consumer behavior, this study found that homes with disease deaths and those without were statistically indistinguishable from each other. Health and hygiene consumption varied most within the medicinal artifact group, while oral hygiene was the most consistent with 0.3 products

per person. In San Francisco, there was significantly more hair, scented and bathing products than in the Oakland neighborhood.

Conclusions:

Both the sick and healthy readily consumed health and hygiene products as a testament to the success of advertising and marketing of medications during this time period. Oral hygiene appears to have been considered a basic necessity because of its consistent appearance archaeologically. The plentiful presence of hair products attests to the growing desire for something less vital to health and in many cases, cosmetic. In San Francisco there were more hair, scented and bathing products resulting from residents' efforts to compensate for a general lack of water on the peninsula that prevented regular bathing.

Several methodological constraints were found. Of the range of consumer goods, it is most difficult to predict the household type or life course from medicine. There is an inverse relationship between medicine and other grooming and health products. This assemblage indicates that the household type is a more accurate indicator of health and hygiene artifact consumption because it has less artifact variance.

Chair: Adrian Brackel
Signature

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