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This investigation used case studies to identify barriers to swimming and water safety education for African Americans. The focus was on urban areas and examines the physical and social settings offering recreational learn-to-swim programs through the experiences of African Americans. The findings include statements by parents of participants, swimming instructors, and nonswimmers. There was agreement that a lack of access and exposure to swimming exists for people who are African American. Knowledge or learning to swim can be viewed as cultural capital; for those not learning to swim, it is a cultural liability. This is a cycle in which the lack of access results in institutional decisions that maintain the lack of access to knowledge on water safety.

Keywords: swimming, water safety, learn-to-swim, African American

While transcribing an interview for this study, a memory popped into my head. The interview was with a career pool manager who loves to dive, an African American and a former city high school diving champion. He spoke fondly of his coach who taught him to swim after he tried out for the swim team because at the time he was unable to swim the length of the pool.

Listening, I remembered a day in 1963 during swim team practice at a Chicago Park District pool. Three boys, who were African American about 12 years old, came into the pool to try out for the swim team. The entire team, of approximately 20 children (girls and boys, ages 9–16) all European American except for me (I am Japanese-American, granddaughter of immigrants), stood on the pool deck watching.

The coach said to the three boys, "Okay, let's see what we've got. Swim the crawl [stroke] as fast as you can to the other side." They jumped in the deep end and swam to other side, their technique nonexistent, their heads up out of the water, and their "times" very poor. Those of us on the deck feared they would not make it to the other side and thought swimming with their heads out of the water was not really swimming.

When the boys finished, the coach called my name and the names of two of my girlfriends (all of us the smallest on the team) and said, "Show them how it's

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done, girls." We dove in using our best racing dives and swam the length of the pool with fast times. As we were getting out of the pool, the coach said to the boys, "See, that's how it's done. Now get out of here!" No one was teaching anyone to swim here and nothing was hidden; it was clear "they" were not welcome, they had no access. Unlike the diving champ (whose interview I was transcribing), no one was teaching the boys to swim while they were on the swim team. The boys were kicked out of practice and even as a child I knew they were kicked out because they were the wrong skin color.

Ten years later (the summer of 1973), I had been guarding at pools for three or four years. At a large group home for adolescents with behavior problems in central Illinois, I was sitting in the lifeguard's chair at the pool. It was a small 20 yard outdoor pool with a diving board over a 9 foot deep end. A group of younger children from another group home was using the pool that afternoon. A boy, an African American about 10 years old, asked, as he climbed out of the shallow end of the pool and walked toward the diving board, "Hey, lifeguard, can I jump off the diving board?" "Of course," I said. He proceeded to the diving board and jumped into the water; he remained on the bottom of the 9 foot deep pool underwater standing upright for several scary seconds until I jumped in and brought him sputtering and coughing to the surface and the side of the pool.

At the time as a lifeguard, my first reaction was this: How can he jump in the water when he does not know how to swim? I assumed anyone jumping into the deep water knew how to swim and knew that the water was deep. My assumptions were a result of learning to swim at age 5 at the local YMCA, continuing to swim at pools and beaches, and eventually passing the lifeguard test. I was familiar with the physical layout of pools, and the norms and procedures; I knew "the code."

The boy's assumptions (I can only guess) included that he could go off the board since the lifeguard said he could, that the water was not deep, and that he was safe. The boy's assumptions were based on a lack of familiarity with swimming pools, their physical design, and not knowing the assumptions under which swimmers and lifeguards function. He did not know "the code." Again, I am guessing, the boy had no idea how deep the water was. When looking at a pool from the deck, there is no way of knowing the depth of the water unless you have experience. It looks to be the same depth in the deep and shallow ends because depth perception is distorted when looking through water. Current regulations require the depth to be clearly displayed on the deck of the pool. Even with the display in feet and inches, there are many children and adults who do not understand that 8 feet means the water is over their heads and 3 feet is the shallow end.

People who have had swimming lessons or who have experience in pools take this information for granted and can very quickly determine the shallow and deep ends—the design of most facilities has the shallow end closest to the entrance to the pool. Other clues include the placement of the buoys, the lifeguard chairs, and diving boards, usually indicating deep water. It seems people who are not familiar with pools do not readily pick up on those signs–signs that are obvious and taken for granted by those of us who are familiar with pools.

There is nothing purposely hidden or exclusionary; however, all of the assumptions from which both the young boy and I were acting illustrate some of the covert issues at swimming facilities and beaches across the United States. What is hidden is hidden to many people who are African American (and many others who are

unfamiliar with pools), as well as to those guarding and managing beaches and pools. As a lifeguard, it never occurred to me that a person would not know the depth of the water or the fact that diving boards are over 8 ft deep water or more (regulations have since changed). It is knowledge that is taken for granted. At times when a person lacks the knowledge, those with the knowledge can use the other person's ignorance to make them feel foolish and unaccepted much like the swimming coach in the scenario at the beginning of this article. The actions of the lifeguards and managers may not be purposefully exclusionary, but nonetheless they result in discomfort or embarrassment at best and in drowning death at worst.

In another incident reported by several news agencies, a group of African American children arrived at a pool to swim. As they entered the pool, White mothers pulled their children out of the pool and stood with their arms crossed, one stating "What are these Black kids doing here?" One may ask whether this was a scene from the 1950s or 1960s. Unfortunately, this incident occurred June 29, 2009, in a suburban area near Philadelphia (the year after an African American President was elected). These three scenes illustrate how the past may affect the present and in many cases the blatant racism of the past is still occurring in pools today. Perhaps given this, it is easier to understand that barriers do exist for African Americans learning to swim and the racism that many believe is in the past persists today. The statistics that follow begin to paint a picture of how this racism, which is both hidden and overt, can result in deaths today.

In the United States, depending on the year and how the statistics are collected, African American children drown at more than twice the rate that European American children drown (Brenner, Trumble, Smith, Kessler, & Overpeck, 2001; Brenner, 2003; Gulaid & Sattin, 1988; Saluja, Brenner, Trumble, Smith, Schroeder, & Cox, 2006; and Warneke & Cooper, 1994; Wintemute, Kraus, Teret & Wright, 1987; CDC, 2014; Gilchrist, Gotsch, & Ryan, 2004; Gilchrist & Parker, 2014). In addition, people who are African American do not learn to swim at the same rates as people who are European American. According to studies by Mael (1995, 1999), the rate of nonswimming for African Americans was four to five times higher compared with European Americans.

There have been a variety of learn-to-swim programs attempting to address the problem of higher minority drowning rates. Unfortunately, most of the programs have floundered. "Experts believe the reason programs such as this fail to keep their fires lit is because minority communities lack interest in the sport altogether" (Mogharabi, 2005a, p. 22). "In fact, USA Swimming, the sport's national governing body, remains more than 80% White and less than 2% Black, based on self-reported membership data. That's despite a decade-long outreach program" (Mogharabi, 2005b, p. 20).

Another recent qualitative study (Irwin, Drayer, Irwin, Ryan, & Southall, 2008) using focus groups reported that:

> African American and Hispanic/Latino respondents were significantly less skilled or comfortable in the pool and less likely to come from a home that regularly exercises, can swim, or encourages swimming as compared to White/Asian respondents. White respondents were significantly more inclined to agree with the statement that "swimming is for me" and significantly less inclined to agree that they feared drowning or injury as a result of swimming than Asian, Hispanic/Latino, or African American respondents (p. 14).

Given the quantitative and qualitative studies discussed above and the few studies on why African Americans drown and do not swim, there has been little reduction in the minority drowning rates (Saluja et al., 2006; CDC, 2014; Gilchrist & Parker, 2014). This lack of progress in the research and in reducing the minority drowning rate suggests that this is a complex problem. The complexities include attitudes and values developed over 100 years of history of mistreatment of African Americans at beaches and pools, as well as continued racial segregation and social reproduction of culture and class in the educational system and other institutions of our society including tax funded recreational institutions, municipal parks, recreation departments, and park districts.

This study examines the covert and overt messages embedded in water safety education and swimming lessons, the certification programs for lifeguards and water safety instructors, and how this education affects the safety of African Americans. Examined are the results and the product of the education for lifeguards, swimming instructors and aquatic facility, and beach managers. The products I have examined are swimming lessons as well as the structure of and the procedures used by the aquatic venues or facilities. The focus of the investigation was the experiences of African Americans with swimming lessons, the swimming lessons themselves, and the physical environment of the aquatic facilities as a way to discover embedded covert and overt messages.

Literature Review

Swimming In the United States

Swimming and swimming lessons are considered part of the norm of growing up in "White middle-class" United States. Many European American children grow up learning to swim at their neighborhood YMCA/YWCA, the park and recreation department's learn to swim programs, or summer camps. A few may learn to swim in school and others learn "on their own" at local swimming holes—lakes, rivers, and quarries. According to the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) annual survey, swimming has between 51.9 and 63 million participants per year during the last ten years (2000–2010). In 2010, swimming ranked third in total participants in this survey while number one was exercise walking and second was exercising with equipment. Over the last ten years in this survey, swimming was ranked second most of the years (NSGA, n.d.).

In studies of activity preferences in physical education, students consistently identify swimming as a top choice. Interestingly, these surveys found no statistically significant differences in preferences for swimming among students who are African American and students who are European American (Fleming, Mitchell, Coleman, & Gorecki, 1997; Hill & Cleven, 2005; Kovar, Ermler, Mehrhof, & Napper-Owen, 2001, p. 119). Please note that these studies were questionnaires and the respondents in at least two studies about self-reported swimming did not always mean swimming, but meant instead being in the water. While many state they are swimming, in actuality they are only standing or playing in water (Mael, 1995; Gilchrist et al. 2000). In summary, swimming is a popular activity in which children and adults state they participate. There seems to be few differences related to race or gender when school-aged children were asked which physical activities they prefer.

Who is Drowning?

Drowning is the second leading cause of death for children ages 1–19 in the United States (Brenner, 2003; Saluja et al., 2006). In addition, "In 2002, nearly 2,700 children 14 and under were treated in hospital emergency rooms for unintentional drowning related incidents" (National Safe Kids Campaign, 2004, p. 2). Of these nonfatal drowning incidents, 15% die later from their injuries, and 20% suffered severe permanent neurological disability. In a study of the cost of nonfatal drowning in the state of California in 1991 the total charges amounted to $11.4 million for 865 people hospitalized (Ellis & Trent, 1995). The National Safe Kids Campaign (2004) says, "The cost of a single near-drowning that results in brain damage can be more than $4.5 million" (p. 2).

Among the populations most at risk for both fatal and nonfatal drowning are young children ages 1–5 and African American males ages 5–19. According to a study by Brenner et al. (2001) African American males aged 10–19 years are about 14 times more likely than White males to drown in a swimming pool. The CDC's statistics included "The disparity is most pronounced in swimming pools; African American children 5–19 drown in swimming pools at rates 5.5 times higher than those of White children" (2014). A study by Warneke and Cooper stated, "The drowning rates among Blacks and Hispanics exceeded that of Whites by 56% and 19% respectively" (1994, p. 593). Examining the drowning deaths of 678 US residents in pools found "Seventy-five percent were male, 47% were Black, 33% were White, and this increased risk persisted after we controlled for income" (Saluja et al., 2006, p. 728).

The research literature on drowning and the discrepancy between African Americans and European Americans revealed several issues, including socioeconomic issues such as less access to swimming pools and swimming lessons, more crowded conditions (Brenner et al., 2001; Brenner, Saluja, & Smith, 2003; Brenner, 2003; Ellis & Trent, 1995; Gulaid & Sattin, 1988; Nieves et al., 1996; Warneke & Cooper, 1994), and lack of swimming skill (Brenner et al., 2001; Brenner, Saluja, & Smith, 2003; Gilchrist, Sacks, & Branche, 2000; Howland et al., 1996; Mael, 1995 and 1999). These quantitative studies did not come to a conclusion about why the discrepancies existed; they only speculated on those reasons. Many of the studies examined death certificates of drowning victims for their data (Brenner et al., 2001; Brenner, Saluja, & Smith, 2003; Brenner, 2003; Ellis & Trent, 1995; Howland et al., 1996; Saluja et al., 2006; Warneke & Cooper, 1994). The studies by Mael (1995, 1999) identified who could swim although he did not ask why or attempt to discover the barriers to learning to swim. Instead, he only identified swimmers and nonswimmers. His conclusion was "the rate of nonswimming among African Americans was 4–5 times as high as among Whites."

Another issue that was addressed in the literature is the physiological ability of African Americans as a group to float. This topic seems to remain controversial in the general public's thinking; however, there is some agreement in the literature that African American adults on average have a denser body composition and longer limbs in relation to their chest cavity size. These differences could result in greater difficulty floating and consequently may increase the difficulty in learning to swim. In contrast, Daniels, Khoury, and Morrison (1997) and He, Horlick, Thornton, Wang, Pierson, Heshka, and Gallager (2002) found there was little difference between

the races in body composition in children before puberty. This means that there is little difference that would affect a child's capacity to float, and consequently their ability to learn to swim. As with many physical skills, it seems there are advantages to learning to swim before puberty.

Other issues identified in the literature, which may contribute to increased drowning rates include adequate supervision or lack of supervision (National Safe Kids Campaign, 2004), risky behaviors of males, the use of alcohol and other drugs in and around water, and increased participation by males in water activities (Howland et al., 1996). Studies by Howland et al. and the World Health Organization (2003) found males across the world are more than twice as likely to drown as females (p. 2). Using the 1990 U.S. drowning deaths, Howland et al. found the ratio to be 4.6 males drowned to one female (p. 96). These issues were not examined related to a difference in results for African Americans compared with European Americans.

The History of African Americans in Swimming Pools in the United States

Other issues that may influence why African Americans drown at higher rates than European Americans may be the history of treatment of African Americans in pools and other swimming venues across the United States. A doctoral dissertation by Wiltse (2003) titled *Contested waters: A history of pools in America,* has described the rise of municipal pools in the northern United States and the accompanying social interaction and cultural change exhibited through the battles over access to municipal waters.

Summarizing this dissertation, Wiltse contended much of our highly charged sexual culture and attitudes related to race were reflected in the battles over the use of municipal swimming pools. The racial intolerance of African Americans in the United States may have been exacerbated in the intimate confines of the municipal swimming pool where people shared the same water while wearing less clothing. During the era between 1920 and 1960, a generalized statement about the attitudes of the European American community was that they feared White women may be looked at or touched by a Black man, which was considered intolerable by many in the White community (p. 156–157). This fear combined with the belief that African Americans were "unclean" (this attitude may have been reinforced by higher death rates among African Americans during and after the Great Migration due to the crowded and unsanitary conditions in which they lived) led to the perception that pools had to be sanitized after African Americans entered resulted in an increased demand for racial segregation (p. 210).

Through his look at the history of swimming pools, Wiltse illustrated that before 1920 there was some level of acceptance of African Americans in "baths" (the first public pools) across the United States when men and women were segregated. This changed to a total lack of acceptance and racial intolerance and to de facto methods used to achieve segregation during the 1940s and 1950s. Then judicially enforced integration resulted in further segregation in our cities and communities. This racial segregation continues to be observed in our nation today with many of our cities becoming "minority majorities." African Americans are 14% of the total United States population yet our cities reflect the segregation that exists—Detroit,

MI is 84% African American; Baltimore, MD 65% African American; Birmingham, AL 74% African American; and Memphis, TN 64% (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011, p. 15), while the suburbs remain inhabited by a majority of European Americans. This continuing segregation in communities across the nation results in less access to swimming facilities and water safety education for African Americans since urban areas have fewer swimming pools than do suburban areas.

Despite this history of segregation surrounding swimming facilities, African Americans do swim and some swim very well. Cullen Jones, an African American, won a gold medal in the 4 × 100 m medley relay and two silver medals in the 50-m free and the 4 × 100 m free relay at the 2012 Olympic Games for the United States (USA Swimming). Marita Corriea was the first Black and Hispanic swimmer on the U.S. Olympic Swim Team and a silver medalist in the 2004, 4 × 100 m free relay. Cullen Jones and Marita Corriea both are medal winners in multiple national and international competitions. The movie *Pride,* released March 23, 2007, and based on real events, is about an inner city Philadelphia swim coach, Jim Ellis, who took a swim team of African American children to the state championship in the 1970s. As the literature confirms, a majority of African Americans do not learn to swim and they drown at 4–5 times the rate of European Americans. There are, however, many examples in which African Americans excel at swimming and many who have taught others to swim.

Framing the Research

Using the Lens of Critical Theory and the Hidden Curriculum

In the United States, discrimination and racial intolerance for so long have been the norm that it frequently goes unnoticed among members of the European American community (McDowell & Jeris, 2004; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Jay, 2003). This discrimination negatively affects the lives of people who have been marginalized. An example of this marginalization is the educational system in place across the United States. The majority of African American children attend schools that "have less qualified, less experienced teachers, lower levels of peer group competitions, more limited curricula taught at less challenging levels, more serious health problems, much more turnover of enrollment, and many other factors that seriously affect academic achievement" (Orfield & Lee, 2006, p. 29). The issue of discrimination in education is historical and is addressed by many education critical theorists such as Giroux, (1983a, 1983b), Freire, (1999), Apple & King, (1983) and to a great extent the works of social reproductionists of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977).

Critical theorists in the United States claim that the center of inequality resides in structural power, which by virtue of the societal structure provide not only social inequality but is reproduced in the normative sphere, for example in educational curricula. As a result of these norms decided by structural power, issues of racism and sexism are not confronted and remain difficult to detect or are hidden in the general information provided to the students. It is no wonder then that swimming or water safety education, as an educational activity, follows the same paradigm of power reproduction. It is possible that the same social reproduction and power structure issues that have existed for education also have and continue to exist related to swimming and water safety education.

This study used the lens of critical theory and the hidden curriculum, to iden-tify covert and overt forms of reproduction and resistance transferred through the instructors, procedures, and settings themselves. The hidden curriculum includes the values, attitudes, and beliefs transmitted in school and through other agen-cies—public recreation, social services, religious centers, and the media—that are not explicit in the formal curriculum. The social structures, the physical settings, the procedures, and the way knowledge is distributed were examined in relation to water safety education of African Americans. The hidden curriculum also includes social control through the use of policies and procedures, resource allocation, and the development of community values.

The issue of "racializing" teaching and learning arises out of adult education theory and practice (for example, teaching teachers). Brookfield (2003) identified that much of the adult education in the United States has been characterized by "an unproblematized Eurocentrism." Eurocentric teaching is the norm, but this Eurocentrism is not acknowledged—therefore it is a problem for those who are not European American. Brookfield states; "To take a racialized view of something is to view it through the distinctive lens of a racial group's experience of the world, and to view that experience of racial membership as a positive constitutive element of a person's identity" (2003, par. 5). Since the racialized view of swimming and water safety education comes, for the most part, from European Americans, understanding how this racialized view affects others' learning (in this case African Americans) is essential in understanding why African Americans are not learning to swim at the same rates as European Americans.

Location, Location, Location

To fully understand the discrimination in communities in which African Ameri-cans live, the context must be recognized. Bennett et al. (2004) identified resource allocation as one area of the hidden curriculum found in professional education. It includes the decisions made related to what part of a city gets what resources. The city of Chicago and the surrounding suburbs are segregated by race. Along with the racial segregation, the following statistics illustrate that segregation also occurs by class. There is a clear difference in the average family income of the different segments of the city and suburbs in the example below. The results are different services offered in different neighborhoods ranging from police and fire department services to education and recreation services.

A dramatic example of the vast differences in schools and the community envi-ronment was reported on the front page of the Chicago Tribune, May 1, 2007. The headline read: "2 Distinct Schools, 2 Emmys: Though they're worlds apart, Chicago Vocational and Highland Park share honors" (Dell'Angela, 2007). Both Highland Park High School and Chicago Vocational Career Academy won prestigious awards from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences; they were two of seven schools across the nation to win the honors. The article described that Highland Park High School, a public school, had "a state-of-the-art TV studio and programs are broadcast daily to every classroom in the building, a more sophisticated setup than some colleges." Chicago Vocational, located on the city's south side is on the other end of the spectrum; they had no classroom TVs and had been in the news in 2007 for three shootings at the school. In addition, the student writer of the award winning short film did not have a computer at home on which to complete the script.

Highland Park is a suburban community about 25 miles north of the city of Chicago, and according to the Chicago Tribune website, has a population of 91.2% White, 1.8% Black or African American, 2.3% Asian, and 8.9% Hispanic or Latino (of any race), with an average family income of $225,693. Using the Chicago Tribune (2005) neighborhood chart, the population for Avalon Park, the neighborhood in which Chicago Vocational is located, is 99.1% nonwhite, including 97.0% Black, 0.8% Hispanic, 0.2% Asian, and 1.0% mixed race, with an average family income of $63,168. The Chicago Public School website identifies that 99.0% of students in attendance at Chicago Vocational are African American with 88.2% classified as low income. As exhibited here, there are vast differences in resources available at public schools depending on the area in which one lives and attends school. These same differences in resources at schools are also true in the recreational resources of the area, including swimming pools and swimming lessons, because, in the state of Illinois, the schools and park district programs often share facilities including gyms and swimming pools.

A study by the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, a fair-housing group, found "stark racial and economic disparities persist in the distribution of access to opportunities across the Chicago region" (Lukehart, Luce, & Reece, 2005, pp. 14–15). Included in this study were quality of life factors, which included access to park land. Consequently, while the neighborhoods may be in close proximity, the resources available to each community are vastly different. Individual resources and lifestyles are also very different. This includes how families choose to spend their money and how they spend their leisure time. When family income is drastically lower their choices related to leisure options are also drastically lower. In many neighborhoods there are no swimming pools. This is a dramatic example of how the hidden curriculum is conveyed through social settings and resource allocation. The attitudes and values are embedded in the lack of resources available. There has been little change in the resource availability in the last fifty years; this demonstrates the disregard with which these discrepancies are treated.

Leisure Participation: The Impact of Race

The majority of the research on leisure and the impact of race are quantitative studies and provide statistical analysis of the differences in leisure choices and some identify the predictors of those leisure behaviors, including personality traits, race, class, gender, and proximity to leisure resources. Quantitative studies are unable to tell us *why* one group of people chooses one leisure activity over another (Barnett, 2006; Floyd, 1998; Floyd & Shinew, 1999; Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994; Hibbler & Shinew, 2002; Lee, Scott, & Floyd, 2001; Philipp, 1997, 1999, 2000; Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2004; Wolch & Zhang, 2004).

The reasons for differences in leisure participation between people of different races have been largely unexplored. As Allison (2000) stated, "Leisure-related issues such as environmental justice, institutional bias and discrimination, program/agency nonresponsiveness, and violence have yet to be systematically explored" (Justice and the leisure domain, para. 1). In the Wolch & Zhang (2004) and Barnett (2006) studies, both identify that there are differences in water-related leisure choices, the result of which is less participation by African Americans. These studies in general supported that swimming is viewed as an activity in which European Americans participate and African Americans do not. In other words, the strongly held ste-

reotype is "Blacks don't swim." These studies also supported that leisure activities including swimming are part of the cultural capital reproduced and transmitted through families, schools, and other social agencies (Floyd & Shinew, 1999).

Method

This study uses a qualitative research design to examine the current curriculum and context of water safety and swimming education in the United States for people who are African American. This design was selected because quantitative studies have not been able to answer the question of why African Americans are drowning and not learning to swim. For the answers, African Americans were asked about their experiences related to swimming and water safety. In addition the contexts related to the communities and the facilities were examined to uncover what barriers to water safety education may exist for African Americans.

Participants

Three agencies were examined and 19 individuals interviewed. The criteria used to select agencies included the following: 1) providing services in African American communities (75% or more of patrons are African American); 2) public information (e.g., brochures, website, etc.) report swimming lessons are provided; 3) services are available to the public, which may include but is not limited to any of the following: public agencies such as park districts, municipal parks and recreation departments, county or state programs, or other agencies known for providing swimming lessons (e.g., YMCAs, YWCAs, Jewish Community Centers, and Boys and Girls Clubs); and 4) agreement to be included in the study.

The three agencies included in this study had six pools, five of which were used to teach swimming. One agency had three pools including a 25 yard, eight lane lap pool 8 feet deep, a 25 yard, six lane pool 3–5 ft deep, and a diving well 20 × 9 yards, fourteen feet deep, with a three meter diving board and two one-meter diving boards. The second agency had two pools including a 25 × 9 yard pool, 3–5 feet deep, and a 20 × 8 yard pool, 2–3 feet deep. The third agency had a small pool, 20 × 7.5 yards, 3–9 feet deep. The diving board had been removed at this pool. The cost for swimming lessons was about the same per lesson across the three agencies. The second agency with two pools had no deep water or water that was over the heads of older children.

Twelve individuals interviewed were present at the three agencies during the observation visits. Seven people interviewed had no direct ties to the three agencies and were selected after data collection began. It was noted after the beginning of the study that individuals who were at pools limited the scope of the study to those who had access to pools. Therefore the seven additional individuals were added to the study. Those interviewed for the study included seven lifeguards/administrators, eight parents of children (seven had children in swim lessons), and four people who did not swim for a total of nineteen participants.

Protocol

Data collected for this study included observation of swimming lessons and the community or neighborhood surrounding the three agencies, semistructured inter-

views, analysis of documents and information available to the public on swimming lessons from the agency, and newspaper articles on African Americans swimming and drowning in the Chicago area. All agencies and participants were offered anonymity and only information that was observable or offered to the public were collected.

The four themes which arose from the interview and observational data included access or *lack of access* to facilities and education, *cultural capital* in the form of water safety knowledge, *social customs* including attitudes and values related to water safety and swimming, and the results of *embedded values* related to water safety and swimming.

Findings and Discussion

Access Issues

Lack of access issues were identified by all 19 of those interviewed. Lack of access included observations or statements that pools were not available in the area (pools are closed, classes are full, and/or the parent feels the agency is not safe); economic issues (no money to pay fees, to buy swimsuits, or to pay for transportation costs); and scheduling and convenience of pools and lessons. The participants of this study stated (and speculated) that other parents must have decided that learning to swim was not important enough to pay the cost. The flip side of lack of access was access to facilities. This subcategory includes how and where participants learned to swim. It seems African Americans learned to swim in the same manner as European Americans, in the same places, and with the same methods. They learned at the park district/park department, the YMCA, and at school. One place that is not mentioned for European Americans in the literature on swimming, but was consistently identified in this study as a place that African Americans learned to swim, was the military. Parents who learned to swim in the military enrolled their children in swimming lessons because many felt it was an important survival skill as well as a leisure skill.

Cultural Capital Issues

Cultural capital—knowledge of how to swim and be safe in water—is difficult to access in African American communities, because of a *lack of access* to facilities and resources. In addition it was evident that the parents who enrolled their children in swimming lessons had been exposed to swimming themselves. Parents were essential in providing access to swimming lessons for their children. If the parent was afraid of the water they were unlikely to provide access to swimming; in many cases they denied access to pools to their children because of their fears. Knowledge of water safety is cultural capital and it improves the quality of life. Knowledge of water safety and how to swim allows people to participate in enjoyable leisure activities and keeps people safe in a number of environments from outdoor settings of lakes and rivers to indoor settings of hotel pools and waterparks. In the United States, many of the vacation and resort areas include water activities. As the parents in this study repeatedly stated, their children did not get to fully participate in these activities because of fears or lack of swimming ability.

Exposure to knowledge of how to swim and how to be safe in water results in accessing the cultural capital and leads parents to enroll their children in swimming lessons. The willingness to be exposed or to expose children to swimming and water activities is the result of attitudes. To have access, exposure is necessary; to have exposure, a facility must be accessible. If there is no access to swimming facilities, there is no learning and no knowledge of how to be safe in water. From this lack of knowledge negative attitudes about water may be developed. Another part of cultural capital includes the attitudes and values or social customs formed as a result of the knowledge or lack of knowledge. This is the third theme, social customs—attitudes and values related to water.

Customs, Attitudes, and Values

Social customs, attitudes, and values related to water safety and swimming are passed from one generation to the next. Participants repeatedly stated their fear of water was "passed down" and there were numerous examples of how they passed their fears to their children, including forbidding them to attend school-sponsored trips to waterparks. Wiltse (2003) describes how European Americans treated African Americans at pools over several decades, when African Americans attempted to go to a public swimming pool they were beaten, chased away, and arrested; they were humiliated as the pool was drained and cleaned after they touched the water. Some of these actions took place only 50 years ago (see *Location, Location, Location* section above) or less than two generations ago; some are still taking place in 2009 near Philadelphia. It is conceivable that the fears of the parents and grandparents about swimming and water activities were passed down, forming the attitudes, values, and customs of the next generation.

Each group of participants in this study indicated that many African Americans feared water and believed that "Blacks don't swim." They also believed that these fears are transmitted in families. Consequently from one generation to the next, African Americans are not learning to swim, instead they are learning to be afraid of the water and they fear exposing their children to education that can keep them safe. They are also not learning how to be safe in and around the water. As a result, social customs develop in which children are not allowed to go to pools or water parks and many are taught to stay away from water activities. These attitudes and values are reinforced and strengthened as statistics are viewed, "African American children drown at more than twice the rate as European Americans" (the beginning of this article) or because someone they know has drowned.

Embedded Values

Results of embedded values related to water activities include the lack of structures or buildings (pools that are only 3–5 feet deep—one of the sites included in this study), the resource allocation related to maintaining the buildings, and the messages about water activities that are no longer questioned. The evidence for this theme was in the physical structure of the pools themselves and in the popular media—the words and actions of what is accepted and assumed to be true. Since these values and beliefs are no longer questioned, new swimming pools are not built, swimming lessons are not offered, and/or pools are built with a shallow depth of less than 6 feet.

Values become embedded when they become common knowledge, and everyone assumes or accepts them to be true. There are examples of this in the popular media. In his August 23, 2006 show, Rush Limbaugh referred to the NBC *Survivor* television series which divided the competitors onto teams by race. He stated that the African Americans are the worst swimmers and used the study by Saluja et al. (2006) to justify that he was not a racist (MediaMatters, 2006). Another example is a report in the Miami Herald, August 18, 2006. Tramm Hudson running at the time for a congressional seat stated, "I know from my own experience that Blacks are not the greatest swimmers and sometimes may not even know how to swim." This was an offhand remark for which he apologized; however, these statements demonstrate that it is a commonly held belief. Remarks that "Blacks don't swim" were heard from the participants in this study from the administrators to the lifeguards and parents. The nonswimmers group did not state this; however, they often made references to their families that no one swam in their families.

As discussed in *Location, Location, Location* above, allocation of resources including buildings and funds to maintain buildings created vastly different facilities. In some communities, there are no pools' in others, pools are not maintained or they are built to be shallow, which does not allow for learning to swim. Several pools on the south side of Chicago are shallow pools with a depth of 6 feet or less. Instructors of classes for lifeguard certification report lifeguard candidates when taking the assessment test state, "I know how to swim, but not in the deep water."

Figure 1 on the next page depicts the formation of cultural liabilities related to water safety in African American communities. Figure 2 depicts acquisition of cultural capital related to water activities. Formation of cultural liabilities is a vicious cycle, going in either direction. If there is no access to facilities there is no access to knowledge, which leads to social customs of no water activities and fear resulting in embedded values—no pools are built and no lessons provided, once again assuring that "Blacks don't swim."

In the first story at the beginning of this article, the boys who tried out for the swim team were purposely excluded from the swimming pool, and knowledge–learning to swim–was unavailable to them. Overt racism was exhibited as the boys were kicked out of swim team practice and not informed or advised to take swimming lessons held at the same pool. The coach, using a more subtle form of racism, attempted to humiliate (because they lack knowledge and skills) them by having the smallest girls "show them how it is done." In the 1960s, African Americans were frequently kicked out of pools where European Americans swam, as depicted in the movie *Pride* (Howard, 2007), and detailed in the Wiltse dissertation (2003). These overt forms of racism at pools for the most part have disappeared; however, the more subtle form of humiliating those who do not have the skills or knowledge can still be observed in swimming pools today. In effect, African Americans who were openly excluded from pools in the past lack access to pools that allow learning to swim in the deep water. In addition, they continue to be subjected to subtle forms of racism and exclusion. They are embarrassed or humiliated at pools because of their lack of knowledge.

Implications for Practice

There was no information in the literature related to educating instructors or continuing education that addressed water safety professionals and those who operate
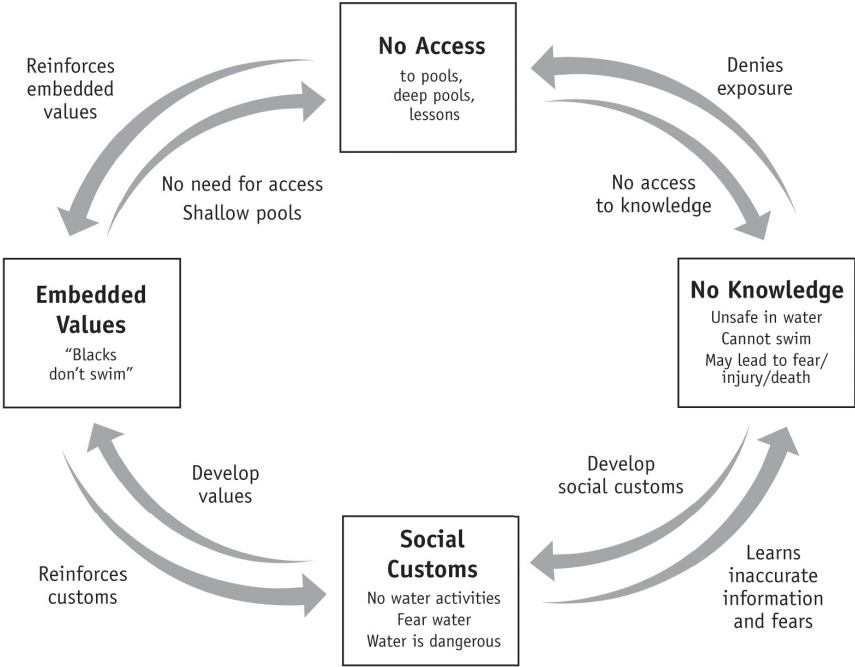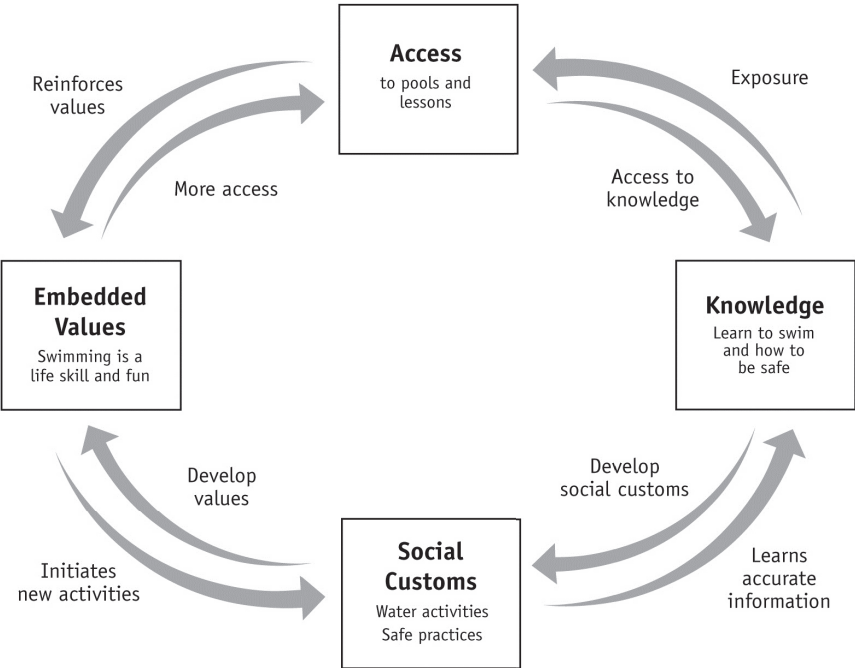
Figure 1 — Forming cultural liabilities.

Figure 2 — Forming cultural capital.

aquatics facilities or beaches. In the education, continuing education, and certification programs related to lifeguarding and swimming, there are a few paragraphs addressing the populations most at risk for drowning or injury while involved in water activities. Since swimming and the teaching curriculums continue to be developed and taught mostly by European Americans, there continues to be the "unproblematized Eurocentrism" (see p. 12). The racialized view of African Americans is not recognized nor addressed in teaching swimming, thus continuing the barriers to learning to swim. This is a major gap in addressing this issue.

Professional development and continuing education can have a substantive impact on water safety education since recertification is required in most venues. Through minimal changes in certification programs, the curriculums may include the aquatics history of the specific groups being taught and an understanding of other people's racialized view. A sense of belonging and feeling welcome can be developed in all water safety programs and venues (e.g., pools, beaches, and waterparks). Required certification programs that implement these curriculum and training changes can bring about rapid changes across the nation in one to five years. In addition, these changes can be supported by the public health sector, as public health inspectors are trained to educate the providers to develop safety procedures that recognize the need to educate all groups as if they have little or no understanding of aquatics venues.

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