

11-1-2009

## The Complexities of De-Constructing the Constraints to African American Female Participation in Swimming: A Rejoinder to Irwin et al.

Steven N. Waller

*The University of Tennessee - Knoxville, swaller2@utk.edu*

Dawn M. Norwood

*The University of Tennessee - Knoxville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ijare>

---

### Recommended Citation

Waller, Steven N. and Norwood, Dawn M. (2009) "The Complexities of De-Constructing the Constraints to African American Female Participation in Swimming: A Rejoinder to Irwin et al.," *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*: Vol. 3 : No. 4 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.25035/ijare.03.04.03

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ijare/vol3/iss4/3>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

---

## RESEARCH

---

*International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 2009, 3, 343-355  
© 2009 Human Kinetics, Inc.

# The Complexities of Deconstructing the Constraints to African American Female Participation in Swimming: A Rejoinder to Irwin et al.

**Steven N. Waller and Dawn M. Norwood**

This rejoinder to Irwin et al. is written to address several concerns regarding “Myth #4: Personal Appearance Limitations” in their recent article. Constraints to leisure are complex and become more complicated when race, culture, family socialization, and hair are combined. Despite the data-driven evidence which they argue refutes “Myth 4” there are several practical concerns that are raised toward better understanding the responses of African American females in the study. We posit that a heightened understanding of the interaction between culture, race, and gender in the case of African American females is vital to the interpretation of the data associated with “Myth 4.”

The study conducted by Irwin et al. (2009) is important for a variety of reasons, namely because it debunks some of the myths behind minority participation in swimming and secondly, it fulfills a dearth in scholarship. The investigation also represents an excellent first installment of a series of studies that will build upon the findings. On the surface, the problem of hair as a constraint to swimming as a leisure time pursuit among African American children and youth appears simple, but conversely it is full of complexities. Hair in the African American culture remains an important symbol. Banks (2000) argued that historically, hair has held several symbolic and cultural meanings in many African societies. Although discussions about hair and people of African descent in North America have shifted over time, issues exist that have continued to reflect some of the tensions that were evident in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in relationship to women and definitions of beauty. Furthermore Banks (2000) posits that skin color and hair continue to be related to ideas about a positive notion of “Blackness.” However, an examination that includes the gendered meanings of hair is important because racial meanings alone of hair do not take into account the complexity of the Black woman’s relationship to images of beauty (p. 42).

On the whole we do not argue against the authors’ presentation of myths associated with constraints to swimming participation, especially among African Americans, their methodology, findings related to expelling Myths 1–3, or even

---

Steven N. Waller and Dawn Norwood are with the Department of Exercise, Sport, & Leisure Studies at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

the presentation of the data related to Myth 4: Personal Appearance Limitations. Our arguments are threefold and grounded in (a) the lack of presentation of constraints research as a theoretical/conceptual framework for the study; (b) their limited attempts to explain the data associated with “Myth 4” as it relates to African American females in the study; and (c) the sociocultural factors associated with hair, hair care, and the lived experienced of African American females. In this rejoinder we use the terms “African American” and “Black” synonymously. Both terms are operationalized for the purpose of this article to identify Americans of Black African ancestry.

## **Constraints Research as a Conceptual Framework**

Throughout the article Irwin et al. (2009) allude to barriers related to physical activity but stop short of “naming” their study as constraints research. Our concern is not grounded in playing a game of synonyms—“barriers” versus “constraints,” but rests in the importance of establishing an important theoretical/conceptual framework for their study. Leisure constraints research has grown steadily over the past two decades. During its maturation, a heightened understanding of the broader influences that shape people’s everyday leisure behaviors has been manifested. Three categories of constraints comprise the general theoretical framework—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. The connection between these categories of constraints has been conceptualized in a hierarchical model (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991; Jackson, 2005) and a series of propositional statements about the operational aspects of the model. Each category of constraint is vital to the study of constraints to physical activity. On the whole, research has proven that constraints to leisure and physical activity seldom exist in a vacuum, but are immersed in the cultural, political, ideological, and power structures surrounding people’s lives (Livengood & Stodolska, 2004). Moreover, recent scholarship has shown that constraints to leisure are not insurmountable and can be successfully negotiated on multiple levels (Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2002; Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007). As researchers we are almost duty bound not only to address constraints to leisure but also elucidate on how the constraints can be successfully negotiated. In the current study, the barriers to participation are clearly pointed out and appropriately tested, but asking the “why” and “how” questions may have yielded invaluable information about how the named “myths” became de-mystified.

The absence of a named theoretical framework in this article leaves the story “half told.” The identification and debunking of the “myths” are important facets of the study, but the establishment of the framework by which the myths are examined is equally important. Understanding the framework in which African American hair as a tripartite (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural) constraint to physical activity is vital to understanding the complexity of the problem. Even more important is the value of this study to the growing body of constraints research that factors in race, ethnicity, gender, and culture as potential constraints to leisure among African Americans.

## Methodological Concerns

We do not wholly challenge the research methodology used by Irwin et al. (2009) in their study, but there are points of concern that warrant discussion.

### Data Presentation

To begin, the possible weight given to the anecdotal evidence used to frame the study is of concern. The authors acknowledge the controlled use of the anecdotes given, but stop short of addressing how important some of the key anecdotes were in framing survey questions. Despite its limitations, anecdotal evidence is important in recreation research where the emphasis might be on learning as much as you can about a specific situation and there is a dependence on a person's own experience for information/data. Even in areas where anecdotal evidence is not considered valid or reliable to the research methodology, it can strongly suggest lines of research (Henderson, 2006). Based on the qualitative responses received inadvertently during the early stages of their research, the researchers listed four most often cited myths by swimming experts concerning the minority swimming gap. Those statements were then infused into the written survey instrument to measure significance. For example, the authors note, "Therefore, the purpose for this segment of the larger research study was to examine respondents' responses to the myths (barriers) and evaluate if any or all are really significant impediments to swimming for disenfranchised minority children" (p. 12). The limitations of anecdotal evidence are that often the anecdotes are curious, peculiar or extraordinary and are not typical or representative. This lack of representativeness means that any conclusions must be made with caution when making suppositions about a much broader population from anecdotal evidence.

In this study, Irwin et al. used a purposeful sample of 1,680 respondents (parents of children 4–11 and adolescents themselves 12–17) survey data were collected from individuals residing in metropolitan areas including Chicago IL, Houston TX, Memphis TN, Miami FL, Oakland CA, and Philadelphia PA. From a data reporting standpoint, readers may be further helped if the frequencies of responses were reported in tandem with the percentages. For example, in response to the survey statement, "I do not swim because I do not want to get my hair wet," only 15% of the respondents agreed while 85% disagreed. The "how many" question becomes important toward proper interpretation of the data.

In the current study the researchers indicated "Myth 4" was primarily directed at lower income, African-American children (Irwin et al., 2009). We argue that across socioeconomic strata the "wet hair" phenomenon is relevant to African American females. Analysis revealed a less than 1% difference between the more economically affluent and lower income respondents. Irwin et al. (2009) surmised, ". . . the only difference worthy of discussion concerning the "hair wet" matter was found with African-American females who agreed with this statement at a 10–12% higher rate (19.7%) as compared with their White peers (9.8%) and Hispanic/Latina females (7.3%; p. 18). With no further analysis of this finding, the researchers quickly combat these statistics by pointing out ". . . African American

females still disagreed with this statement at a rate of 81.3%, which obviously dispels the “hair wet” myth among this group of respondents” (p. 18). Examining one segment of the income variable may not be sufficient to make broad-sweeping claims. Though these findings may be statistically sound, they are not sufficient enough to totally dispel what this group of researchers regard as a “myth.”

## **Problems Stemming From a Quantitative Approach**

Another concern with the current study as related to the “hair wet” statement is, though drawn from inadvertent qualitative statements, it is purely quantitative. No exploratory instrument is used to offer understanding or explanation of the nuances behind the quantitative data. The study does not appear to factor in the element of Black family socialization. Inherently, an important theoretical/conceptual framework germane to this study has been missed. Hill and Reed (1993) addressed the importance of accurate conceptual theoretical frameworks when they stated, “A major impediment to understanding the functioning of Black families has been a failure of most analysts to use a theoretical or conceptual framework that viewed the totality of Black family life” (p. 5). Invariably, the influence of Black family life may have been missed as they analyzed the quantitative data.

Furthermore, the study lumps minority groups together, Black and Hispanic, thus making it difficult for the reader to isolate the experiences of just one race. On the other hand, the researchers did report that Black females agreed with the “hair wet” statement at a 12% higher rate than Hispanics. But in looking at the overall response rate of 81.3% (which can be unclear to the reader as to what the researchers actually mean here), Irwin et al. (2009) seem hasty in concluding this “. . . obviously dispels the ‘hair wet’ myth among these groups of respondents” (p. 18). Nothing about this finding is obvious nor does it conclusively dispel this “myth.” This type of value-laden language—obviously, dispel, and myth—sends a message that trivializes and devalues the lived experiences of Black females’ personal hair care challenges, particularly as it relates to swimming.

## **Use of Parents/Guardians as Surrogates**

In the current study, the parents and/or caregivers were asked to complete the survey instrument as a “proxy” for children ages 4–11. As reported in the methodology and results sections of the paper, at times it is unclear who the actual respondents are. Is the instrument actually being posed to the parents thus, capturing their thoughts, or is the instrument being posed to the child of that parent and responses then documented based on the child’s thoughts/response? Regardless, it is problematic because more often than not children aged 4–11 have not developed agency to the point where they are able to articulate whether hair is an issue in their swimming participation choices or not. In this age range parents, particularly mothers, are more likely to be responsible for maintaining their child’s hair. Thus they would better be able to discuss any rigors of hair care. More important to the integrity of the study is the method for controlling for the biases of the parent who is acting as a surrogate for the child. Some data specifically reported the swimming ability of the parents of the children aged 4–11. For instance the authors state “an alarming number of respondents (20% of the adolescents and

25% of the parent respondents) admitted to being unable to swim” (p. 14). We suggest that if this survey also captures the responses of parents, it contradicts the stated purpose of the research which was to target minority children, not parents of minority children.

In utilizing the responses of parents as “surrogate” or “proxy” responses for children 4–11 the issue of controlling for the biases of parents surfaces. Surrogate or proxy respondents are commonly used in survey research collected to assess characteristics about children (Bielick, 2003; Olson, 2003); however, very few studies evaluate the effectiveness of the use of proxy respondents in recreation research. Bielick (2003) suggested that researchers often use proxy data because there are limitations involved in interviewing children, due to children’s cognitive abilities and the difficulty in obtaining consent and cooperation. Researchers often interview parents about their children and then draw conclusions about the children from parents’ reports.

In this study, based on the swimming experiences of the parent(s), whether positive or negative, biases are bound to appear in the data. Biases on the part of the respondent can pose a threat to internal and external validity of the research design (Riddick & Russell, 2008). Babbie (2007) argued that when people are asked to respond to survey items they typically will answer through a “filter” that is often based on their experience (p. 251). The inherent challenge in utilizing the parental surrogate is controlling for the bias. For example, Rajmil and colleagues (1999) conducted a cross-sectional longitudinal study designed to examine the influence of the proxy respondent on health interview surveys in children. The sample size was 2,433 children younger than 15 years of age. The interviews were answered by proxy respondents (the mother, father, or other caregiver), with the questionnaire adapted for the proxy respondent. Logistic regression models were used to analyze the relation between the proxy respondent’s characteristics and health status and health care utilization, controlling for the effect of sociodemographic factors. The results revealed that proxy respondent’s characteristics influenced the reports of chronic conditions and accidents within the last year. Proxy respondents over 55 years, men, the father, and the grandparents reported a lower rate of chronic conditions. Age of the proxy 55 years or greater, men, fathers, and grandparents showed a lower probability to report accidents. The primary conclusion of the study was that selected characteristics of the proxy respondent can influence responses to health surveys involving children. This study points to the possible shortcomings of utilizing proxy respondents.

## Use of Mixed Methods

Due to the complexity of the questions and data surrounding “Myth 4,” we suggest that a mixed methods approach to addressing the intricacies of the “wet hair” issue would have been more helpful. The mixed methods approach “yields different views or slices of complimentary data, and can guard against biases that may emerge when using a single approach” (Riddick & Russell, 2008). Even though mixed methods research designs are still relatively new in social research, they aid greatly in understanding the stories behind the data (Creswell, 2003). Because of the nuances associated with “Myth 4” a *concurrent triangulation strategy* with a mixed methods design would be more than appropriate. Creswell (2003) notes

that “this model generally uses separate quantitative and qualitative methods to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other” (p. 217). The strategy integrates the data from the qualitative and quantitative data collection phases as a part of interpreting the data. Optimally, there is a convergence of the findings which serves to strengthen knowledge claims or explain the lack of convergence that may manifest. For example, in the current study, qualitative inquiries directed toward the “wet hair” issue among the 12–17 cohorts, coupled with the quantitative data gleaned from their surveys, may have revealed subtle points that led to a heightened understanding of the rejection of the premise that hair is an impediment to participation in swimming.

In a tangentially related study, Mobily, Mobily, Lessard and Berkenpas (2000) used a mixed methods approach as a part of a case study that described the effects of individualized aquatic exercise programs with two participants with knee impairments. The cases were compared and contrasted relative to valid data collection methods and response to aquatic exercise. Results suggested that both quantitative and qualitative data may be useful in determining the effectiveness of aquatic exercise programs. In particular, qualitative data provided insight into the meaning of the activity for the second participant. In essence, using a mixed methods approach extracts meaningful data that may increase the validity of results.

Without the rigor of mixed methods, the results associated with “Myth 4” in Irwin et al.’s study appear dismissive of the “wet hair” matter for Black females. Based on this single sample, a broad “statistical brush” has been used to paint the possibility of “wet hair” among African American female respondents in the sample as a “non-issue.” Carefully designed qualitative and quantitative questions will elicit the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of respondents. It also allows the researcher to use probing techniques to gain more understanding of the interviewees’ responses as opposed to pigeon-holing them into “agree” or “disagree” responses. Perhaps utilization of the mixed-methods approach will yield different results that will include how Black women negotiate the racial and cultural trap-pings of participation in swimming and personal hair care.

## Other Related Concerns

Of minor concern is that the study included males. Though only by a small margin (by 1%), males outnumbered females in the study. Males, regardless of their race simply do not encounter the same hair maintenance issues as do females. This is because as a societal norm, males typically wear their hair cut short or even shave their heads. This is something that is not mentioned in the limitations of the study.

We also offer that word choices are potentially problematic in this study. As previously stated, the term “myth” in this entire study is perhaps misused, specifically as it relates to the wet hair issue for Black females. By their own reporting, “myths are fictitious stories or half-truths, especially ones that form part of the ideology of a society” (Irwin et al., 2009, as cited in American Heritage Dictionary, 1999). This definition undermines the anecdotal evidence of Black females who have reported hair as a constraint to their swimming participation. For instance, a recent response to an article that appeared in *Essence Magazine* entitled “The Sinking Truth: Why Black Kids Can’t Swim” was posted to *Essence.com*. Ironically, data from USA Swimming that Irwin et al. (2009) cited was used

to construct the response to the *Essence* article. Several African American women posted their own reasons as to why they do not swim. For example, MP wrote:

My sister and I never learned how to swim because we had a lot of kinky hair, and my mother didn't want to be bothered with washing, blow drying and pressing it all the time. Most of our little girlfriends never learned to swim for the same reason (2008).

Angel wrote:

I too have swimming lessons a couple of times and still cannot swim. I dread my son going swimming even though he's a pretty good swimmer. I think that the association of death and water does play a great role in the way I think about swimming. Besides, as an African-American woman it's more work on my hair to swim. I do not see swimming as an activity. I see it more as a survival technique if it's ever needed (2008).

The qualitative comments featured above lend credence to the lived experience of African American girls who grew into women. To suggest that the lived experiences of these Black women are myths is culturally insensitive. There is much more to the story behind the data than assigning the results of a small subpopulation within the sample as "institutionalized cultural hearsay" (p. 21). Moreover, it points to the absence of cultural context in this research study.

## **Cultural-Familial Contextualization of the Hair Variable in the African American Experience**

Understanding the cultural context of the participants in this study is vital to proper interpretation of the results. Underlying the data are significant reasons why swimming for African American females may be a lesser selection among physical activity choices. Lester (2000) suggested that "treatments of Black folks' hair as a complex and simultaneously personal and political issue has not been dealt with so prolifically and Black girls must come to terms with their hair in the face of culturally competing beauty mythologies" (p. 207). Noted author bell hooks elucidates on the importance of Black families helping their daughter to come to terms with the realities of their hair in her book *Happy to Be Nappy* (1999). Furthermore, Ward (1996) chronicles the experience of African American mothers and the acclimation of Black daughters into the complexities of Black hair care in the following quote:

When my daughter Patsy was four, I would sit her down between my legs and every morning as I combed and braided her hair I would reach up and run her hands through it. "Look," I'd say, "Look at how pretty your hair is. Feel how tight and curly it feels. Look at how pretty it can be when you style it with ribbons, beads and bows, or when you just let it be. Look at how different it is from your little white friends and how special that is" (p. 86).

The quotation stated above illustrates the genesis of an African American woman's orientation into the challenges surrounding self-esteem, self-love, self-

care, social acceptability, and learning to cope with the trappings of the uniqueness of Black hair. Implied in the term “different” in the above quote is the fact that the texture of African American hair requires specialized care due to its uniqueness. Similarly, the same may apply to persons of mixed African and Hispanic/Latina heritage.

The questions asked to respondents about “Myth 4” were relevant, but they skim the surface of the cultural and familial experience of African American children and youth. Because of the complexity of the issues relating to Black hair care, responsibility for care, time allocated for hair, and cost are variables that must be considered. Depending on the hairstyle worn by some African American children and teens, such as hair weaves, the economic investment can soar upward of \$200. Most Black female teens will shutter at the thought of eroding their investment quickly. In addition, there are supplemental questions that relate specifically to the African American experience, that if asked may have yielded very useful data. These questions include the following:

1. I do not swim because as a part of my family upbringing I was encouraged not to get my hair wet.
2. I do not swim because my parent/guardian would be upset if I got my hair wet.
3. I do not swim because I pay for my own hair care.
4. I do not swim because the bathing cap does not always prevent my hair from getting wet.
5. I do not swim because I do not want to “touch up” my “kitchen” (hair at the base of the neck) and temples after swimming.
6. I do not swim because I am concerned that the chlorine in the water may damage my hair.

These questions are significant to African American, female teens for several reasons. First, in households where income is limited, the female parent often bears the responsibility for “pressing” or straightening the hair of female children. If there are multiple female children in the household caring for the hair of dependent female children can become time-consuming for the parent. Second, from a social standpoint, appearance is important to teens in the 12–17 age cohort. Belgrave and Allison (2006), two noted African American psychologists argue,

Historically, curly and nappy hair has been considered “bad” hair and long, straight hair has been considered “good” hair. Today, there is more acceptance of the diversity of hair styles that include straight, curly, twists, braids, locs, Afros, extensions, and weaves. A good hair “do” is important to self-presentation of many African American women. And African American women spend the necessary time and money on their hair. (p. 148)

Commonly, African-American teenage girls wear their hair relaxed, that is, a chemical straightener applied to the hair so that the hair does not revert back to its natural curly state when shampooed. Relaxers can make the hair seem easier to comb and brush, but they do require regular upkeep. As new hair growth comes in, a touch-up (relaxer applied to the new growth) is necessary to keep that uniform

look. This takes time and money. Byrd and Tharps (2002) in their book *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* argued that the texture and appearance of one's hair is frequently associated with beauty, income, and social status, thus, when young African American women are employed they often spend their limited income on hair care products and/or get their hair "done" by a beautician. Arguably, getting one's hair wet during swimming quickly erodes the investment in hair care. Relatedly, African American beauticians, in some cases, discourage young women from swimming in pools where there is a high level of chlorine because of the negative impact that the chlorine has on Black hair (Dawber, 1996), especially when the hair has been "permed" or chemically treated. The end result is breakage of the hair, which requires additional care to restore it to its natural state.

It is interesting to note the number of comments appearing on blogs these days in response to queries about African American women, hair and swimming as a leisure pastime. For example, one blogger noted the following:

Black women have this thing about getting their hair wet. I always talk about it to my colleagues whenever there is a pending thunderstorm or hurricane. I dread going into the rain as I did a few weeks ago when I had to hunt someone down on a story assignment.

I can't just allow my hair to air dry and if I did, it would be puffy instead of sassy! When I know it's going to be a stormy day, I'll pull my hair back in a bun to keep it tame through the rain. We recently ran in our Life section a picture of a Black woman swimming in a pool and she had a swimming cap on her head. I laughed on the inside because I understood why.

I love being in the water and the exercising quality of swimming laps. However, if I didn't have to go through the tedious regimen of getting my hair looking right again, I would swim more. And finding a good shower cap to protect your hair from getting wet is a hard find. We even wear shower caps when we take a shower to protect our hair. The only time my hair gets wet is when it's time for a shampoo. That's why you won't see Black women in mass numbers laying pool side or crashing into waves at the beach. It's just too much trouble to keep the hair looking presentable afterward, especially if you have a hair weave or some other exotic hairdo that is unique to Black hair (Green, n.d.)

When comparing the plight of African Americans against other racial/ethnic groups, again context becomes tremendously important. If perceived constraints or barriers to physical activity and related myths are going to be meaningfully addressed then critical race analysis can be employed as a plausible option. The authors wholeheartedly concur with Floyd (1998); Glover (2007); Henderson and Ainsworth (2001); Philipp (1995), Shinew, Floyd, and Parry (2004); and Waller (2009) about the need for relevant race analysis and the development of theory that factors in race. Optimally, this study will catalyze subsequent research that explores the complexities of leisure, gender, family socialization, race and participation in active leisure pursuits.

## Conclusions

Recently, one of the authors of this rejoinder viewed a news clip shown on a local television station that related to the disproportionate number of drownings in the county. While an official from one of the local hospitals spoke about methods to prevent drowning, the camera showed a large number of African American youth who appeared to be ages 12–17 swimming in the pool. Over the 10 s that the camera panned the pool the viewer noticed at least 10–15 girls in the pool with and without swimming caps, but what was even more striking was the larger number of cap-less young women walking or sitting on the pool deck. Upon seeing this cadre of young women sitting on the deck as opposed to being in the pool, a myriad of questions surfaced. For example, (a) Did the parent(s) know the child was swimming without a cap? (b) Who maintains their hair and how will they respond to wet hair? and (c) What were the real reasons why the teens sat casually on the deck and were not swimming?

As we explore the constraints to swimming among African American females, the role of family socialization and messages conveyed about hair and hair care cannot be ignored. Shaw (1997) argued that it is within families that individuals learn leisure skills, interests, attitudes, and behaviors, and research has indicated continuity of recreation and leisure interests learned in childhood and adolescence across the life course. Families also construct time and opportunities for leisure, as well as constraints. However, the family's influence on leisure is often distinguished by gender, social class, age, race/ethnicity, and culture.

Family dynamics shape leisure meanings and participation across the lifespan in a myriad of ways. Family is both a source of leisure opportunity and constraint, reflecting the tension between individual wants/self-determination and societal norms/expectations of others. This tension is perhaps best illustrated in the gendered experience of family leisure and in cultural differences in perceptions and notions of leisure. At the same time, individuals negotiate family constraints to leisure and report finding freedom or leisure within constraint. Finally, how and why family is important to individuals' experiences of leisure differs across cultures and changes across age and time as family roles, responsibilities, and structures change, development occurs, and societal norms and cultural practices are challenged.

To further understand the depth of the cultural context and family socialization arguments relative to the hair of African American females, note the photographs displayed in the book *Colors of Recreation* published by the Ethnic Minority Society, National Recreation and Park Association (1996). The book photographically chronicles minorities recreating in a variety of settings from 1920 to 1996. Of particular interest to the study by Irwin et al. (2009) are the photographs presented on pages 4 (Philadelphia, PA; *Playground Association's Traveling Street Shower*; Philadelphia Recreation Department; circa 1920) and 36 (Newark, NJ; *Open Swim Meet*; Newark Recreation Department; circa 1995). In both photographs African American females appear with bathing caps on to cover their hair. It is interesting to note that over the span of 75 years between the Philadelphia and Newark photos that water, head coverings and African American female children remain constant. In the same book compare the aforementioned photographs with those of the Hispanic/Latina children displayed on pages 19–20

(Dallas, TX; *Pool in Little Mexico*; Dallas Parks and Recreation Department; circa 1940) and there is a noticeable difference—no bathing caps. A better comparison emanates from a photograph displayed in the book *The Play Life of a City: Baltimore's Recreation and Parks 1900–1955*. In the section relating to equal access to park and recreation facilities, a photograph of African American children and youth swimming at a segregated pool in the Druid Hill area of Baltimore is featured (circa 1971; see Figure 1). The photograph displays eight African American females receiving swimming instruction, five are wearing bathing caps and two are not (City Life Museums, 1986, p. 30). The pictorial evidence suggests that African American females desire to learn to swim, but a consciousness about hair and water remains ever-present.

On the surface, what may be interpreted by some as a narcissistic concern about hair among African American females between the ages of 12–17 has everything to do with “fitting in” among peers and social networks. Hair and hair care is an important facet of the lived experience of African American women regardless of their age. In addition, for many young African American women, across socioeconomic strata, hair and hair care is an investment of time and monetary resources.

We concur with Irwin et al. that “this research just scratches the surface of why minority children are not participating in swimming . . . that the data are



**Figure 1** —Druid Hill park swimmers.

preliminary” (p. 22). There is nothing but good that can stem from continued research into the constraints to participation in swimming by minority children and youth. Perhaps the findings by Irwin et al. (2009) are indeed true, but the complexities that surround “Myth 4” are weightier than the current analysis reveals, especially in the case of African American females.

Increasing minority involvement is an important issue for swimming programs across sectors and without question research helps us understand and contextualize the constraints. The authors are applauded for this line of scholarly inquiry, but in subsequent studies additional attention should be given to the cultural aspects of participation in active physical activities such as swimming and constraints research.

## References

- Alexandris, K., Tsorbatzoudis, C., & Grouios, G. (2002). Perceived constraints on recreational sport participation: Investigating their relationship with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 34*(3), 233–252.
- Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research* (11th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth.
- Banks, I. (2000). *Hair matters: Beauty, power, and Black women’s consciousness*. New York: New York University Press.
- Belgrave, F.Z., & Allison, K.W. (2006). *African American psychology: From Africa to America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bielick, S.L. (2003). *Intra-dyadic agreement between Parents and their teenagers*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Sheraton Music City, Nashville, TN.
- Byrd, A.D., & Tharps, L.L. (2002). *Hair story: Untangling the roots of Black hair in America*. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin.
- City Life Museums. (1986). *The play life of a city: Baltimore’s recreation and parks 1900-1955*. Baltimore, MD: Baltimore City Life Museums.
- Crawford, D.W., Jackson, E.L., & Godbey, G. (1991). A hierarchical model of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences, 13*, 309–320.
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dawber, R. (1996). Hair: Its structure and response to cosmetic preparations. *Clinics in Dermatology, 14*(1), 105–112.
- Floyd, M.F. (1998). Getting beyond marginality and ethnicity: The challenge for race and ethnic studies in leisure research. *Journal of Leisure Research, 30*, 3–22.
- Glover, T.D. (2007). Ugly on the diamonds: An examination of white privilege in youth baseball. *Leisure Sciences, 29*, 195-208. Green, M. (5 September 2008). The Black Women’s Hair Dilemma: You Can’t Just Shake And Go. Available at: <http://divadish.theledger.com/default.asp?item=2258182>. Retrieved June 28, 2009.
- Henderson, K.A., & Ainsworth, B.E. (2001). Researching leisure and physical activity with women of color: Issues and emerging questions. *Leisure Sciences, 23*, 21–34.
- Henderson, K.A. (2006). *Dimensions of choice: Qualitative approaches to parks, recreation, tourism, sport, and leisure research*. State College, PA: Venture.
- Hill, R., & Reed, W. (1993). *Research on the African-American family: A holistic perspective*. Boston, MA: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- hooks, b. (1999). *Happy to be nappy*. New York: Hyperion.

- Irwin, C.C., Irwin, R.L., Ryan, T.D., & Drayer, J. (2009). The mythology of swimming: Are myths impacting minority youth participation? *International Journal of Water Research and Education*, 3, 10-23.
- Jackson, E. L. (2005). *Constraints to leisure*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Lester, N.A. (2000). Nappy edges and goldy locks: African-American daughters and the politics of hair. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 24(2), 201-224.
- Livengood, J.S., & Stodolska, M. (2004). The effects of discrimination and constraints negotiation on leisure behavior of American Muslims in the post-September 11 America. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36, 183-208.
- Loucks-Atkinson, A., & Mannell, R.C. (2007). Role of self-efficacy in the constraints negotiation process. The case of individuals with fibromyalgia syndrome. *Leisure Sciences*, 29, 19-36.
- Mobily, K., Mobily, P., Lessard, K., & Berkenpas, M. (2000). Case comparison of response to aquatic exercise: Acute versus chronic conditions. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 34, 103-119.
- National Recreation and Park Association, Ethnic Minority Society. (1996). *Colors of recreation*. Philadelphia, PA: Quantum Leap.
- Philipp, S.F. (1995). Race and leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 17, 109-120.
- Olson, K.M. (2003). *Do 'knowledgeable' respondents really know more? A comparison of parent and teen reports of teen spending*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Sheraton Music City, Nashville, TN.
- Rajmil, L., Fernandez, E., Gispert, R., Rue, M., Glutting, J.P., Plasencia, A., et al. (1999). Influence of proxy respondents in children's health interview surveys. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 53, 38-42.
- Riddick, C.C., & Russell, R.V. (2008). *Research in recreation, parks, sport, and tourism* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Sagamore.
- Shaw, S.M. (1997). Controversies and contradictions in family leisure: An analysis of conflicting paradigms. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 29(1), 98-112.
- Shinew, K.J., Floyd, M.F., & Parry, D. (2004). Understanding the relationship between race and leisure activities and constraints: Exploring an alternative framework. *Leisure Sciences*, 26, 181-199.
- Waller, S. (2009). Doctrinal beliefs as a determinant of sin associated with select leisure activities. *Journal of Unconventional Parks. Tourism & Recreation Research*, 2(1), 7-18.
- Ward, J.V. (1996). Raising resisters: The role of truth-telling in the psychological development of African American Girls. In B.J. Ross Leadbetter & N. Way (Eds.), *Urban girls: resisting stereotypes and creating identities* (pp. 85-99). New York: NYU Press.