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Editorial Introducing the Special Issue for Diversity in Aquatics

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Editorial Introducing the Special Issue for Diversity in Aquatics

Cover Page Footnote

This special issue owes a debt of gratitude to the authors for their patience during this unprecedented time and protracted review process, as well as to the special editors who recruited reviewers (thank you, reviewers!) and provided initial editing of papers. Those special editors were Austin Anderson (Southern Indiana University), Steven Waller (University of Tennessee), and Angela Beale-Tawfeeq (Rowan University). The special editors offer many thanks for their editorial assistance to Stephen and Jeanne Langendorfer (Bowling Green State University) and Jenny Blitvich, co-editor, Federation University, Australia!

The *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education* has collaborated with *Diversity in Aquatics* to publish two special issues focused on a coordinated and collaborative effort among various aquatic stakeholders to examine issues of diversity as part of a holistic effort to address drowning as a “neglected public health issue.” Cultural respect is critical to reducing health disparities and improving access to aquatic education, water safety, and drowning prevention efforts, that are respectful of and responsive to the needs of diverse populations. As readers will certainly discover, the aim of this work is to present topics which call for the field of aquatics, aquatic education, drowning prevention, and water safety education to value the importance of embracing a framework for drowning prevention grounded in issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion.

The first special issue, Vol. 11, Issue 4, published papers focused on various educational and research topics, historical perspectives, and plans of action surrounding and impacting diversity in aquatics inspired by the *Diversity in Aquatics* “Call to Action.” This current issue (Vol. 12, Issue 3), however, appears at a time of enormous unexpected societal change, one where, as a global society, we face a huge and deadly public health threat, CoVID-19, caused by the novel coronavirus. Our current social demographic, as we face this global public health threat, has made issues pertinent to social justice, equity, and inclusion central, not only to the evolution of the field of public health, but for us all, as global citizens, members of one global society.

This special issue provides a platform to share insights from empirical research (including quantitative, qualitative, case study, intervention, and community-based studies) as well as a theoretical/educational paper. Analyses of aquatic involvement, aquatic policy, planning, and professional development, and historical underpinnings of aquatic participation from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives are presented. This issue features four original research articles which show the continued desire to add to the scholarly literature in aquatics yet to be fully explored, and a thought-provoking educational research article. We believe that this issue represents powerful informed voices addressing drowning, social justice, and aquatic inequities as a “neglected public health threat” in need of public policy change.

Research Articles

In their article entitled, “Citizen Engagement in Aquatics Equity: The Case of the Winston Waterworks,” Steven N. Waller (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), James H. Bemiller (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Emily J. Johnson (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Chermaine D. Cole (DeSoto Parks and Recreation Department), Jason Scott (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), and Angela Wozencroft (University of Tennessee-Knoxville) have examined the role of citizen engagement in the aquatic policy planning process, utilizing

a project in Winston-Salem, NC as a case study. Set against the backdrop of the historical and legal racial inequities in aquatic programming in the United States, this article offers an intriguing look at the power of grassroots-level advocacy to inform public policy and help to distribute recreational services equitably. Through the example of aquatic facility planning, the article offers an enlightening look at how engagement around recreational facilities can “move the needle of social justice toward equity.”

In their article, “A Comprehensive Analysis of Aquatic Programming at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs),” Tiffany Monique Quash (Indiana University), Knolan C Rawlins (Delaware State University), and Shaun Anderson (Norfolk State University) examine aquatic programming at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The researchers surveyed 102 HBCUs to better assess the prevalence of aquatics programming at these institutions. The results of this study indicated that there was inconsistent institutional knowledge about competitive and non-competitive swimming programs from the past to the present. Identifying aquatics programming at HBCUs is a critical step to addressing the drowning disparity in African Americans and other minorities.

The implementation of professional development and training programming that is inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) has the potential to create an equitable work and educational environment for communities. In their article, “LGBTQ Training for Aquatic Employees: Impact on Attitudes and Professional Competencies,” Austin Anderson (Southern Indiana University), Eric Knee (Indiana University), and William D. Ramos (Indiana University), examine the impact of a LGBTQ+ diversity training program on the attitudes and professional competencies aquatic employees. Researchers recruited and surveyed aquatic staff members with assumed diverse racial /ethnic, sexual, and gender identities from the campus recreational staff at a major Midwestern university to examine the attitudinal and professional competency changes experienced by participants as a result of a targeted LGBTQ diversity training geared toward the promotion of inclusion and equity within a campus recreational sport setting. Data, consistent with the literature, revealed that although LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is often included within the strategic action-plan of universities, rarely do these curricula meet social justice education standards. Results of this study did indicate improved attitudes towards the LGBTQ community among participants who participated in the training program.

Adding an international flavor to our articles, Linda Quan (University of Washington School of Medicine), Elena Shephard (University of Washington School of Medicine), Elizabeth Bennett (Seattle Children's Hospital) have authored “Evaluation of a Drowning Prevention Campaign in a Vietnamese American Community.” The article reported on the

conduct and evaluation of a community water safety campaign for Vietnamese American families in the State of Washington. The authors worked with community groups, parks departments, and public health officials to disseminate three key messages (learn to swim, swim with a lifeguard, and wear a life jacket) in Vietnamese media and at events as well as offer free/low cost swim lessons and life jackets in the community. The campaign was successful as evidenced by more water safety awareness during the post-intervention period.

Educational Articles

Therapeutic relationships offer solid foundations for treatment and rehabilitation for professionals from a variety of health professions, such as counselors, psychotherapists, social workers, nurses, physical therapists, music therapists, occupational therapists, and recreational therapists (Austin and McCormick 2017). In their article, "Aquatic Therapy Interventions and Disability: A Recreational Therapy Perspectives," Jason Scott (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Angela Wozencroft (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Vincenzo Nocera (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Kelsey Webb (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Jodi Anderson (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Avery Blankenburg (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Darrien Watson (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), Sophie Lowe (University of Tennessee-Knoxville), have provided a review of empirical research on the impact and benefits of aquatic therapy interventions, on varying disabilities (i.e., osteoarthritis, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder) via the lens of the Recreational Therapy (RT). The main purpose of this review of literature was an effort to document the wide array of benefits of aquatic therapy on varying populations.

The final educational article regarding diversity in aquatics came to us from the South Island of New Zealand. Dr. Chanel Phillips from the University of Otago authored "Wai Puna: An Indigenous Model of Māori Water Safety and Health in Aotearoa, New Zealand." In this fascinating educational article, Dr. Phillips describes Wai Puna which focuses on the importance of engaging the customs and culture of indigenous people in providing water safety and swimming programs for the Maori from New Zealand. Her hypothesis is that by integrating the mythology and history of water in a culture will enhance the ability to develop water competence and reduce drowning. You will enjoy the read.

We hope you find these articles in this Special Issue (12:3) of *Diversity in Aquatics* to be interesting and thought-provoking.

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