

# **Constraints Impacting Minority Swimming Participation:**

## **Phase II**

### **Qualitative Report**

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**Presented to**

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**By**

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## **Introduction**

The need for research on factors influencing low swim participation among racially underrepresented youth within metropolitan settings in the United States, possibly contributing to disproportionately high drowning rates among marginalized youth (particularly African American), served as rationale for USA Swimming, the National Governing Body for the sport, to commission a nationwide study on the topic ultimately completed in 2008 by a research team from the University of Memphis Department of Health and Sport Sciences. In order to carry on this line of research, USA Swimming commissioned a follow-up study in 2010 (Phase II) to confirm original findings, and to expand the research process in order to more fully comprehend the problem. Survey research was accomplished and quantitative results were reported (See full report at-- <http://www.usaswimming.org>). Focus group interviews were added to the plan for the 2010 research to achieve a more mixed method approach to better understand a crucial, life-threatening public health issue. The following is a summary of the focus group interviews conducted to coincide with and to expressively represent the quantitative results of Phase I and II.

## **Focus Group Approach**

A focus group is a method of qualitative inquiry that utilizes communication and interaction among and between the researcher(s) and research participants to gain detailed and rich descriptions about an issue. The format of focus groups facilitates group discussion and interactions that can reveal more than in a more formal interview setting. Through this discussion, a deeper level of understanding is possible that typically is not accessible through survey questionnaire items. Effective focus groups tap into issues of importance to the participants making it possible to gain information that can inform decision-making.

The aim of these particular focus groups was to gain a deeper understanding of the opinions and experiences of adult parents regarding swim participation. We especially wanted to uncover information about the experiences of those parents who may have negotiated constraints to encourage their children to participate in swimming. We also hoped to find out what barriers are perceived by parents of non-swimming children. Finally, we were interested in soliciting ideas regarding ways to increase swimming participation for minority youth.

### **Method**

To investigate the research questions, members of the research team worked with Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) organizations in six large cities (Atlanta, Boston, Denver, Memphis, San Diego, & St. Paul/Minneapolis) in the United States of America (US) to conduct focus groups with parents and caretakers, some who had children who swim and others with children who were non-swimmers. A total of 12 focus groups were conducted, each with 5-9 individuals, and sessions lasted from 45 to 90 minutes.

The subjects of the study were purposely selected because they utilized YMCAs located in low socio-economic areas, with considerable numbers of minority members, as identified by YMCA administrators. A total of 72 parents or primary caregivers of young children (53 women, 12 men, and 7 who did not report their sex) took part. Forty participants with children who could swim were grouped together for the purpose of the focus groups, as were 32 individuals whose children did not swim. Thirty-three individuals identified their child's race as Black or African American (43.4%), 22 as Hispanic or Latino (28.9%), 4 as White (5.3%), 3 as Black Hispanic (3.9%), 2 as Asian Black (2.6), 2 as Native American (2.6%), 5 in categories other than those listed above (6.5%), and one person did not report. There was a range of educational levels with 10 individuals having not completed high school (14.1%), 21 with a high school diploma or equivalent (27.6%), 27 with a college or technical degree (35.5%), 11 with advanced college degrees (14.5%), and 2 who did not report. As some of the participants were

non-native English speakers, it was necessary to employ a Spanish-speaking translator for some participants in 3 of the focus groups.

Administrators and staff employees from the six market site YMCAs were contacted for assistance in securing focus group participants. The study objectives, interview protocol, focus group questions and consent forms were sent via email to a designated YMCA contact for each facility. YMCA staff members assisted researchers in identifying members who met the necessary criteria and these individuals were invited to participate by the YMCA representative. Incentives offered for participation included child care provided by YMCA staff during the duration of the focus groups, and a grocery or general merchandise gift card distributed at the conclusion of the focus group. Some of the YMCAs provided a meal, others provided beverages.

### **Procedures**

Focus group interviews were held at YMCA facilities, all of which housed pools except for one focus group gathering. Upon arrival, introductions were made and the study was briefly described by the researchers. Participants were told they would be sharing information about their child's swimming ability and interest, as well as their own swimming experiences and thoughts about swimming opportunities. Subjects were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and provided with a consent form to read and sign if they wished to continue participation. All focus groups were audio and video recorded, and subjects were informed that only the researchers would see and hear this footage and that all participants would be assigned pseudonyms for any written reports.

Each focus group was facilitated by at least one member of the research group. The moderator of the focus group followed a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) which consisted of a list of open-ended questions to address with the group. In addition to relying on the interview guide, the moderator also probed, requested elaboration or clarification, and compared and contrasted statements made by group members. At the conclusion of each focus group the researchers debriefed by reviewing interview notes,

discussing the recent process, and enhancing interview questions in response to especially salient or novel responses from focus group members. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio tapes and video was utilized when necessary to identify speakers.

### **Data Analysis**

Coding was performed through a process of repeated readings and interpretation of the transcripts. During the initial coding process, observation and debriefing notes taken by all researchers present for focus groups were also shared and discussed. Researchers deliberated and identified overarching themes and patterns.

## **Results**

To provide a complete picture about attitudes the parents and caregivers held about their children's swimming participation and ability, quotes from individuals are presented to support various themes. Occasionally, segments of conversations from a focus group interview are offered to show the interactions among parents and caregivers. For the purpose of this report, we identify the focus group by the city in which they were interviewed or by first name pseudonyms.

Our analysis resulted in four primary categories emerging from the data, labeled *swimming access*, *parental perceptions that hinder swimming participation*, *parental perceptions that encourage swimming participation*, and *strategies to increase minority participation in swimming*. The higher-order categories and the themes within them are illustrated in the following text and quotations.

### ***Swimming Access***

#### **Structural barriers to swimming participation**

We sought to determine if our focus group participants were impacted by structural constraints commonly identified as negatively impacting minority access to recreation.

Participants with children who did not swim were asked to share reasons for this lack of participation. Probing questions insured that four topics were discussed, including the availability of a comfortable and safe pool in which to swim, access to transportation, sufficient finances, and discretionary time that would permit parents to allow their children to participate in swimming.

### **Facilities**

Perhaps the most encouraging finding suggested parents we spoke to all had access to safe facilities in which they felt welcome. Our focus group participants were members of local YMCAs and were pleased with the condition of the pools, the general environment, and the way they were treated by staff members at the YMCAs. One focus group participant in Denver, Alva, who is Latina, explained that she believed a recreation center she had formerly attended was “kind of racist...” Another focus group member, however, like other individuals who were interviewed, she had found a YMCA in which she felt comfortable and welcome.

### **Transportation**

Focus group participants in some cities (e.g. Memphis, Denver, San Diego, St. Paul/Minneapolis) generally owned automobiles and drove themselves and their children to the YMCAs. In very large, population-dense cities (e.g. Atlanta, Boston), public transportation was available, however Boston residents shared difficulties related to public transportation. The residents of this cold weather city who did not own cars had the most difficulty traveling to pool facilities, especially during the winter months.

### **Finances**

A lack of discretionary funds was commonly stated as a reason for non-participation. For families with a number of children, concern about finances became more salient as a reason for not participating in swimming lessons where they would incur a cost above the monthly YMCA membership fees. Issues surrounding finances and pricing strategies were explored thoroughly during this research and will be reported on throughout this document.

## **Time**

Working parents did indicate a lack of discretionary time. Parents who did not have consistent employment shared that their inability to have a set schedule resulted in difficulties in planning recurring activities for their children. Other parents admitted that after working all day, they did not always want to spend more time away from their homes, so they did not enroll their child(ren) in swim lessons which would also be a standing commitment for the adult.

## ***Parental Perceptions That Hinder Swimming Participation***

While the above structural constraints were mentioned throughout the course of the focus group interviews, there was a great deal of emphasis on, and discussion of, cultural barriers to swimming. Barriers resulting from cultural beliefs were emphasized by parents and caregivers, and explored in more depth to identify shared understandings of minority swim interest, participation and ability. Some of these common elements included specific concerns related to personal appearance and socially constructed understandings that may serve to discourage swimming participation for the African American and Hispanic/Latino population.

## **Cultural expectations**

Sharyl, an African American mom from Boston, “I still stick on the fact that its culture.... I still think it’s that and what you see on TV, you see a lot more of Caucasian kids or adults loving the beach, loving the water you know what I mean, being fish-like, a lot of things play into this it’s not just the statistics; it has to deal with life, I do believe that.” In support of the cultural beliefs impact ideas about appropriate activities, she added: “I don’t want to get stereotypical but for some African American families they don’t like the water and being cold and just like skiing is a sport that Blacks don’t participate in and that has changed over the years. Both of my boys and husband ski and swim. So there are certain sports...”

## **Hair “issues”**

A number of African American and Black caregivers shared that a major reason for non-participation in swimming was simply due to “hair issues.” Nan, a Boston mom, shared, “I like the pool, I like to be in the water but me and the hair issues, no! Having to do my hair over and over again, and with the chlorine (laughing). To be truthful, that’s why I don’t swim.”

Some interviewees exhibited and shared a deep understanding of cultural norms that have long influenced hairstyles of Black girls and women (Bryd & Tharp, 2001). While her daughter “likes to wear her hair blow dried out and straightened out,” Josie, a Boston parent, believes certain hairstyles limit opportunities for young girls, and she is aware that a preference for these styles can negatively impact girls’ swim participation.

Rochelle was forthright in explaining “most African-Americans don’t wash their hair every day. White children are washing their hair, so it’s a little easier for them. Neither Rochelle nor Josie uses chemicals on their daughter’s hair. Josie’s daughter “will wear braids and a style that can allow her to wear it straight for a little bit but when it gets wet and it shrinks up she’s ok with it.” Rochelle stated, “My daughter has locks in her hair so...I don’t really care what she does.”

Josie shared that she has told her daughter, “Beauty is not just because your hair is straight. You can wear your hair in many different styles naturally and still enjoy the sport. Right now, don’t let that be what prohibits you from being able to participate in something that you really enjoy doing.” She believes in “helping [girls] to build their self-esteem and accept who they are, that this is how you have been created by God to be...”

Randall, an Atlanta father, explained , “A lot of (African American girls) won’t get in (the pool) because it will mess their hair up.... The texture is different...A lot of girls do not do it.” Lena, another Atlanta parent, concurred that “the chlorine in the pool will strip all

of the protein out of your hair. It's really bad for African Americans..." Robert, also from Atlanta, described the time that goes into styling the hair of African American girls: "You are talking hours, it takes hours. You are talking about the time in the pool but then after the pool the hours that you have to spend getting hair ready for the next day." Randall followed up this statement by talking about costs, explaining, "And, you are paying \$80 or \$90 to get it done."

Jolene discussed the enormous commitment she has made so her daughters could participate in swimming:

I braid their hair for the whole week. They have swimming on Thursdays. On Fridays, I wash their hair for the whole week, and then I do it (braid hair) every weekend. On Sundays, don't call me, don't talk to me. I have two girls that I have to take care of. And I want to do it. You have to have a set of mind of that's what you want.

The effort that goes into hair care primarily impacts the swimming participation of girls, as corroborated by Liane, who recalled, "Looking back I would say my brothers, they did very well because they didn't have to deal with their hair."

### **Peer pressure and overconfidence**

A Minnesota mom shared the opinion that boys tend to be overconfident, which can jeopardize their safety:

I think there just might be...ya know, I'm thinking about my own brother and his friends, growing up and they're like, 'Yeah, I know how to swim' and they just jump in the water. I think girls, some girls have that hesitation. They're like, 'I am not about to jump in that water,' where a boy, he wants to be a boy and act like he knows how to swim, and show his friends ...It's kinda like that attitude, 'oh watch me, we're having fun, it's just water'...

An Atlanta mom was concerned about her 14-year-old son who "...thinks he can swim...when he's around his friends and they're around the water. He swims a little bit across the pool but I don't know if he could really get out there and last a while."

An Atlanta swim coach and parent, Jonah said, "I think the people that are lifeguards know that, uh, you hear stories all the time. People walk by a pool or see a pool, especially kids, and if they are out with their peers and what not they're not going to say I can't do anything. And if they see their peers do it they are going to try."

Robert agreed, "For a lot of them it looks so easy."

Interviewer: "You think its boys more often?"

Lynn: "Uh huh" (confirming prior statements)

Jonah: "Oh I see it all the time. The boys, they try out for the school team and 'I can swim, I can swim'... and you put them in and then you gotta go in after them to save them...."

### **Inherited fear**

Parents and caregivers who did not encourage, or even discouraged swim participation often shared that they were fearful of water. In such cases, the adults seemed to pass their fear of water on to their children. Boston mom Karmen recognized this phenomenon, stating, "A lot of parents are scared and afraid so they make their kids afraid or they don't feel comfortable taking their kids to a pool." Angie, from Denver, is an example of a parent whose fear of the water impacts her children. She stated her children don't swim because, "...of the fear of me not knowing how to swim.... I wish I would've started that earlier because now it's a phobia for them."

Another non-swimming Denver parent, Shar, has a 17-year-old son who has:

...a big fear of the water. He won't go in it. He doesn't like to get water splashed on his face. He'll wash his face with a washrag. He doesn't like put his face in the water. He'll hyperventilate, because he doesn't like to have that feeling of water in his face. It's been since he was very young. When he was a baby and we'd

wash his face or his hair and he'd (gasp). You'd have to tell him 'breathe, breathe.'" He just has never took to the water. I saw that fear so I never put him in the water because I don't know how to swim either. I never put him in the pools."

Atlanta mom, Marlene cannot swim and has a 12-year-old son who is "just afraid of the water." He's been going to a neighbor's pool for two years but "just sits there on the side and plays." When asked if he could save himself if he was thrown into the pool, she was convinced, "He would just drown."

### **Making swimming a priority**

Some parents did not view swimming ability as a necessity and did not view lessons as a means to protect their children by making them safe in and around water. Rather, keeping their children out of the water altogether was assumed to be a mode of protection.

Liz, a mom from Boston, was one such parent who did not encourage her children swim. She disclosed, "It's not important so... I never looked into lessons for my kids because it just wasn't that important to me. And then I'm kind of scared of them swimming.

Jonah, an African American dad from Atlanta and an accomplished swimmer shared why he felt relatively few African Americans swim:

It's because (swimming is) a learning sport. It requires you to have someone teach you to do it. To teach someone to do the sport it requires money and you have to pay for lessons. If you have the money to do it...then it requires time.... I make it a priority. No matter what comes up I know have to be at swimming from 5-6 because it is a priority and if anything else is just going to have to wait. And those 2 things, that's money and making it a priority, I think Black folk, African

Americans, have not put the time and effort into doing that. They don't put their money into teaching their kids how to swim.

Gloria's responded to Jonah, sharing that she did prioritize swimming and had her child in lessons. However, the struggle to pay for these lessons was a concern to her. Her will to ensure she has a swimming child is apparent in the following sentiments, "It's very expensive because.... I started my daughter with private lessons and it was like \$55 a lesson and we were doing 2 lessons a week so you know, it gets very expensive over time. I was like 'how many lessons is this going to take?'" Jonah reiterated the commitment that is necessary by adding, "It requires time and time and time, to which Gloria replied, "...I can see the improvement so it's not like I am going to stop. You see the progress being made... it just has to be a priority you know, but if I had 2 or 3 children then I don't know if I could do it."

Tess, from Minneapolis, exemplified the struggle that many parents face in prioritizing swim lessons when on a limited income, "I'm not gonna say we poor or nothing, I just think it's like us Black folks, we have more things that's like important to be doing, Ya know I'd rather pay some life insurance on all my people, ya see what I'm sayin'? Right, or my car insurance, instead of my kid going swimming. What's more important?"

Angie, from Denver, shared her perspective as a Latina mom, "In the Latino culture, they think of other activities. (Swimming) is not a priority. They prefer to put (their kids) into mariachi; they prefer to have them play soccer. In Mexico, the Hispanic culture, there's not a lot of that opportunity (to swim)."

### ***Parental Perceptions That Encourage Swimming Participation***

Adults who knew how to swim saw the value in making sure their kids could swim as well. There were no parents or caregivers who had average or above-average swimming ability who discouraged their children from swimming. All of the parents of non-swimming children were non-swimmers themselves, providing a variety of reasons

for this inability. Although a number of non-swimming parents were nervous about or fearful of water some sought to overcome this legacy of fear and explained that was important that their children become swimmers. These parents wanted to provide an opportunity to their child that they did not have and made an effort to be especially supportive and encouraging.

### **Getting kids in the water**

Clearly, the parents in our focus groups who wanted their child or children to swim made swim lessons a priority. Many parents wanted to provide an opportunity for their children that they did not have while young. Some expressed a desire to feel secure when their children were around water.

Sharyl revealed that while she loves sitting around the pool or being at the ocean, she does not swim. She attributes her inability to the fact that her parents also did not swim. However, she wanted her children to be swimmers and stated, “My son can swim because I felt it was important to have them be able to get in the water and not be afraid of it. My daughter, she’s just starting so she’s not as advanced as my son but I think with just more swimming lessons she’ll get better.” Sharyl clearly realizes that swim ability takes time and is persevering, treating swim lessons as a long-term commitment.

Gail from Boston, also a non-swimmer, finds comfort in the fact that her child has learned to swim, “My son is a swimmer. It was important to me because I am not. I always wanted my children to know to swim so at a young age I began to get her lessons. She has had a lot of private lessons. I didn’t know if anything would happen and I wouldn’t be able to help her because I can’t swim.” Donna from Boston stated, “[My girls] wanted swimming and I know it’s better for them. I don’t know how to swim.... I don’t want to limit my kids. I want them to get the best of what I didn’t get which is swimming lessons.”

Bill, an African American dad who was a good swimmer, stated, “It’s a matter-of-fact experience. (Swimming) is just something that we do. Whereas when I was growing up

we didn't have access like that. So it wasn't just something that we would do. My sister doesn't swim, my brother doesn't swim, my cousins don't swim. It's an accident that I swim (laughs) because we didn't have access like that....So it is just something that (my kids) do. So they expect to be swimmers.”

Dierdre, a Boston mom, maintained parents must overcome a fear of water to having a swimming child: “We all have our personal fears. We need to tell our kids about what they need to do. Because we're all freaked out, you know what I mean, so it's pushing...forcing yourself to look away from that mentality.” Liane also expressed, “I think if the parents feel comfortable it's easier for them to transfer that comfort to their kids.”

### **Keeping kids in the water**

Of those who did provide swimming lessons for their children, many expressed feeling most comfortable when they could supervise their children's actions. Some shared that the nature of swim lessons, where you turn your child over to a swim instructor lessened their degree of comfort.

While single mom, Liane, has a 3-year-old son who was comfortable getting in the pool, she admitted she would not entertain leaving the pool area when her son is at a swim lesson. She said, “I just don't have the comfort level of other people.... So it's more of my issue, not his. He doesn't really care one way or another.”

A number of adults recognized that having parents and caregivers at swim lessons may be problematic. Sheila provided the following example: “My children, they like for me to be there but I know that if they look like something is going on then I have to step back because if I am always right there and I grab them, maybe that's not the good thing to do.”

Macy admitted, “I had to (leave). If not they would have always looked at me when they were getting nervous, so when (child's name) was 3, I stepped out.”

Nan, whose child does not swim, shared, "I think that my presence would be not beneficial to my daughter. I know how I am and she knows if I panic, if mommy feels like anything is going wrong, it's over. She knows that about me, like as soon as she starts getting uncomfortable I jump right in."

Liane described a recent lesson in which her young son let go of the wall and went under water without the instructor's permission or supervision. He had to be pulled from the water, and Liane's first reaction was to say, "Didn't I tell you to stay on the wall?" She added,

Then I started asking him if he was okay and he said his belly was hurting and (was) sort of rubbing his belly and I was like, 'George, you have to stay on the wall you know you're supposed to'....Then I was like, 'Are you ready to go back in? You don't have to go back in, you can stay out for a little bit,' and he kind of kept sucking his fingers and then eventually he went back in. But again I'm trying to be very forward thinking about the situation and not have him develop a fear so I'm just trying to keep encouraging him even though that situation happened and it freaked me out afterwards. But I (believe) you have to go back in the water, you can't develop a fear about this, that's why I'm here. I just said 'everything is okay, you're alright, go back in.' And he went back in and had a good time.

Trina talked about her son's first lessons and despite his reservations, she insisted he continue. "It was truly torture. He was the kid screaming on the side of the pool the whole time. He went every time but he would scream his head off. For whatever reason it's in the past and you really can't get him out of the water now."

Karmen was resolute in stating, "I'm one of those parents that's like 'you can do it' and 'you're gonna do it' and 'my will is stronger than yours.' My daughter had a strong will but I was like, 'Okay, you can cry it out or you can do it.' She's young now so I can

make her do it, but when she gets older if she chooses not to swim that's one thing, but she will have the ability to swim.”

Dierdre originally stayed in the pool area during her daughter's lessons, sharing, “At the beginning I was trying not to stay because I thought she was just not doing as well as she should or could because she was getting frightened and looking back at me saying to me. The director did ask me just kind of peek in [and said], ‘Go somewhere you can see her but she can't see you,’ so that's what I did. She's doing a lot better. I let her fight through it. It probably hurt me more than it was hurting her. The director just kept saying, ‘She'll be fine.’ That face it was just, ‘Please help me,’ but I did let her cry and I fought through those feelings...”

Stephanie followed up on Dierdre's comments and stated that when her son was looking to her she would say things such as, “Yes. Good job!” She also shared, “And he just wanted that little thumbs up” reinforcing her son's thoughts of, “I'm doing a good job Mommy, right?”

Lana was resolute in her idea that parents should not attend lessons: “If you don't have a parent at the lesson, the child will most likely get over the fear as long as there's a good instructor because the instructor is going to say ‘It's ok. You can do it’... That way parents that have their own fear can step away.”

Felicity described her daughter's initial reaction to swimming:

She was afraid of the water so I had to bring her several times and then finally after three or four classes she was fine in the water... So it took her more time and more classes (than her sister) to really learn how to swim. ....I didn't stop the lessons and I didn't push her either. And they were very good, the instructors were very good over here and they really didn't push them. They sort of had them feel their way into the water. So it worked out well.... We just kept coming and we were determined. We kept spending money but we were determined.

Karmen asserted, “I believe in the push, I mean mine, I don’t think she was afraid... she’s just stubborn. I just believe in pushing and if you can do it you’re gonna do it. I mean I think that’s how my daughters work. My older daughter, she was stubborn but I was like ‘you’re gonna walk’ and she did and I told my baby girl ‘you’re gonna swim,’ and she did. So, you know, it’s all in the push.”

### **Getting parents in the water**

While some parents retained a fear of the water, others enrolled in swim lessons as adults. These parents should be commended for their willingness to conquer fears or break through barriers that have kept them, and may have prohibited their children, from learning to swim.

The parents who discussed making an effort to learn how to swim as adults mentioned wanting to inspire their children. There were some parents who were contemplating learning and, in fact after some of the focus group sessions, there were parents who recommitted to learning.

Crystal, from Boston, was one such parent, sharing, “I think it is important for me to get back in the water because I did take (lessons) a couple of times.... I think it’s important for us to get in there because if we get in there....We’ve got to get our hair wet (causes group to laugh). If they’re afraid, we’re afraid too, but I think they learn from us.” Crystal believed parental encouragement was especially important, stating, “We’re all leaders and we’re the ones that can direct them.” She also added, “I think it’s important for us to encourage them. I think it’s important, sitting here thinking about it, the more I think I really need to get back in (the pool).”

Kristina was another non-swimming parent who committed to lessons. Her will is apparent in the following conversation with the interviewer:

Kristina: I don’t swim. I’m taking swim lessons. I am currently taking lessons because my daughter wanted to learn to swim. She started in September and we’re not a swimming family.

Interviewer: So no brothers, sisters, parents?

Kristina: Nope.

Interviewer: But you're learning?

Kristina: Yeah.

Interviewer: How's that going?

Kristina: It's going (group laughter).

### **Opportunities and benefits-swimming**

A number of parents and caregivers believe encouraging their children to learn to swim may positively impact future opportunities. These benefits are illustrated in the following statements:

#### ***Employment***

- You know in a sense it profits a lot because at least now the kids are getting ready to do lifeguarding. So they can work and do something for their self.
- A motivator is money. I used to tell the kids all the time instead of just getting the (city) job in the summertime learn how to swim and you can be a lifeguard. It pays a lot more money than those other jobs. Lifeguards get paid like 12 dollars an hour so it's much better for them to be lifeguards and they can get more hours.
- And it's a workout. I told them all the time—swim! The money (made through lifeguarding) motivates them to learn how to swim!
- All the other different opportunities that the water opens up too. You learn to swim, lifesaving. My son got into swimming because he was a dare devil so I put him in lessons...but he wants to go into the Navy. He wants to be a rescue swimmer.
- When you are teenagers you are lifeguards so it's not just swimming but it opens up so many more opportunities for jobs, for life choices, so many different things. Even just the social aspect.

#### ***Fun***

- In the summer time we are around the water a lot. You know boats in the family, jet skis.
- We use swimming for family fun.

- Living in (this city), the winter is so long. They have to have something that they could do. You know and just to be able to bring them to the pool on lousy winter day, you know they're like in the pool for 2 hours and yeah.

### **Education**

- So even opening up scholarships for college, your career choices that you have...
- ...scholarships...so many things open up. About people of color not being able to go to college sometimes because of finances but have the ability academically and you know in sports so now this opens up a whole arena and not just basketball....and not just football.

### **Health**

- We can use swimming for a lot of cross training um so no matter what sport they pick they can always use swimming as a way to develop their body, you know the muscle groups that they are using
- This is a very healthy sport that's not so hard on your joints and the body.
- You can't control every single thing that they eat and I figure if you raise them to be either a runner or a swimmer, they'll always stay healthy.
- Good for recovery and rehabilitation.
- It's a healthy sport too and um it helps with your health. Because both my kids suffer from asthma and since they have been swimming they haven't been suffering the asthma
- This is a very healthy sport that's not so hard on your joints and the body.
- (My daughter) lost a lot of weight. She wasn't over-weight but I mean she was a little thick but she just dropped weight and slimmed down, everybody notices it.
- (My daughter) has been swimming since she was 2, they say that because of her autism, they say that it's been working well.
- We put our daughter on the swim team because she has a liver disease, and actually I think (swimming) is the only thing that works for her, her body and her liver.... Not to get better but to stay in the same place. It works really, really good. She is kind of healthy right now.
- Just being able to be in the pool, instead of running and jumping and those kind of things, this works better for her. Okay, so for health reasons.
- It is very important for her to swim. And it's very important for her to be healthy; it doesn't matter if she gets that first place, just for her health.

## ***Strategies to Increase Minority Participation in Swimming***

### **Recognize finances vs. fear**

While Evelyn, from Minneapolis identified cost (a structural constraint) as one reason her daughter didn't swim, Evelyn's fear was most prohibitive. She volunteered, "I'm scared.... I'm scared for her.... it's the cost, and um, I'm scared...I'm scared for her, I don't know, I'm kinda scared, but she's not afraid. I'm scared." Arlin, another fearful parent shared, "...my baby, he's scared, so he has a fear of water... I fear for my baby, something might happen..."

Yvonne, from Denver, also discussed finances and fear when she wondered if swim lessons for her child were worth the effort, maintaining, "...you're already uncomfortable and scared. You're like, 'I'm paying them so I can have heart palpitations on the sidelines.' It's not worth it. It really isn't. Why should I have to pay money to be afraid?"

Rachel from Boston defended the charges for swim lessons:

I don't work for the Y, you all before I say this: On one hand in order to get a professional to teach your child how to swim they have to get paid too. The cost has to come somewhere. You can't expect anything for free because that person has a family or that person has bills and responsibilities that they have to do. If you want to just sort of get anybody to teach your child to swim then you won't have to pay for it, but if you want to get a professional that knows what they're doing and you care about that person and their welfare you are going to have to pay.

Celia offered: "I think too, that's why I want my daughter to learn how to swim because if you know what you're doing, if someone teaches you, you don't have those accidents where you ingest too much water."

Nina was extremely fearful of water. She said she intends to put her 9-year-old son in swim lessons every year, and shared that he often asks her if he can swim. Nina confessed, “My problem in every year I’m gonna put you in swimming, I’m gonna put you in swimming, but I always delay.” Some of the other parents began to challenge Nina, saying things such as, “Does he want to learn to swim?” and “You better knock it off and let that boy swim!” Nina admitted, “I was just scared that something was going to happen to him.” She then asked the group about costs and was concerned that \$60 for an 8-week session was “a lot of money.” She also wanted to know, “How long does it take to swim?” to which others in the group responded that it “depends on the person.”

When pressed with the question, “How much would you pay for your child to be safe in the water? If they did fall into a lake or a pool?” Nina replied, “Wow. See that’s hard. You made it tricky now.” Others in the group agreed that this was a difficult question. When the question was expanded to, “Is there an amount? So if they learned maybe not (just different) strokes...but maybe to float and to (survival stroke) to the side or to the shore?” Alex responded, “I think everybody should learn how to do that” and Gail confirmed his opinion with, “Everybody should learn how, take water safety.” Rachel immediately exclaimed, “I don’t think any amount is too much. It’s any amount.”

In further discussion about the cost of swim lessons as a means of water safety, the group began to discuss the price of each session: “So let’s say it’s \$40 for 8 sessions, so that’s \$5 a session. Would there be an amount that you would be willing to pay for each session that would work?” Nina seemed to be thinking out loud: “If it’s \$5, like you said, you broke it down. If it’s \$5.00 a session or yeah...” to which Rachel responded, “That’s good, that’s cheap” and Nina agreed, “You know, yeah, it’s reasonable. Yeah, I would pay that.”

### **Discussion on hair**

In regard to overcoming constraints due to popular hairstyles, and encouraging more African American girls to participate in swimming, Josie believed “... again it’s educating parents.”

In an attempt to recruit new swimmers, a coach, Jonah explained that he needed to offer advice on hair care. He explained, “I had to call some of the old people who knew what to do with their hair and get their suggestions so they could tell the new people what to do with their hair...”

### **Emphasize drowning rates not swimming ability**

Olga stated, “In reality too, you won’t even think that swimming is that important until your actually saying drowning because now you’re like ‘what about if my child drowns?’ it never crossed my head. What would be....what would I do? I always see her swimming around and splashing and always laughing or whatever but it would never cross my head to say ‘if it ever happened to my child’...”

Sheila revealed there were more things she wanted to talk about, stating, “I think something like this requires more time and more thinking and more, more people, more parents, more.....you know because this time right now, since your throwing [the drowning rate statistics] at me it’s like now I’m starting to think, you know....and now it’s almost over. In terms of the next questions, I mean....you know...”

Liane followed up, “I don’t think people know the statistics. Letting the parents know the real statistics, I think can make a big difference.”

### **Start them young**

Tabitha expressed, “I think that if more kids at the younger ages were exposed to the pool, like wet them with the water, like even outside just wetting them with the hose I think the fear of water would probably dissipate and that they would enjoy the pool.”

In Boston, the conversation led to a parent recalling “when my kids were going swimming when they were small. A lot of people used to bring their small babies and let them try the water. Because really, truly babies can be scared of water when you put them in so these parents used to come at certain times bring the babies in and put on

the little thing on them and they [would] go in the water with them and move them around let them feel it.”

Lana made sure from the time (her children) were babies they crawled through the water. She shared, “All 4 of mine have been water babies. But I’m also a water person so I think it’s what they see. They were all less than a month old when they were first introduced [to water].”

Shelly also had her children in the water from the time they were young: “You know we spent so much time in the pool with the kids when they were little before they could swim and with Grandparents. We’d just always pass the kids around then they would practice a little bit; [We would say] ‘Woo hoo! Look at you! You went under!’ and all that type of stuff. It was fun.”

Jonah, a swim coach and parent then added, “The younger ones have stuck with it and have learned how to swim and become good swimmers and learn how to deal with the hair issue. They kind of go through that. But if you try to bring one in that is 12 you have to fight with them to stay with it. The parents, the child, none of them are on board and neither one of them wants to go through it.”

### **Peer mentoring: Parents helping parents**

When discussing options for parents to inform others, Josie shared, “Oh I would definitely like to do that. In terms of like helping parents in our community to...I talk to parents in our community all the time, you know friends, neighbors, church members.... You know people will listen, particularly ...when they hear from people who are lay people who are not these savvy swimmers. They respect you because you are being truthful and honest. But they are like, ‘Wow, how did you get over the fear of putting your child in water?’...’ Like you may be afraid of...so with the ability that you’ll be able to give that trust to another mother or father when you are speaking to them about it and I think that’s when all programs should probably have our parents who are fearful to be

participants to help promote it in a greater way. You really have to involve everybody in order to make something really go over well.”

### **USA Swimming support**

Xavier, a dad whose son is on a swim team in Boston, believed it necessary to “offer a free clinic on like the weekends at like the YMCA’s or community centers. They should do like free clinics. And have people from USA Swimming or other places come and do free clinics and you know post [fliers] around so people can get encouraged and make it like a fun day but at the same time to train the parents in learning.”

Sharyl and Josie, two more parents from Boston whose children are also swim team members discussed a USA Swimming sponsored diversity camp that offered two weeks of training. Josie explained, “Their swimming times...had to be really fast times.”

Sharyl expanded:

If you want diversity...not to say our children can’t achieve those goals, but they set the standards so high that out of the whole city of Boston I don’t think anyone qualified and no one got to go. So I don’t know if USA Swim is really doing enough to promote diversity. They say they are but they set the standards so high, I think they need to build up to that. How are we going to change the statistics? And these statistics have been like this for years. My question is what is USA Swim doing to improve those numbers for children of color and Hispanic children to change those statistics?

Josie continued

I just couldn’t believe the times. It was a wonderful opportunity to spend two weeks in Denver, all expenses paid to go to a diversity camp for USA Swimming. It just came out about a month ago and we were like, ‘Wow this is great,’ then we looked at the qualifying times it was like ‘oh my goodness.’ It was like unattainable. So I mean you can’t set the standards that high for something that

is beginning to change. You know most of our kids haven't been swimming that long to reach those goals. I was really discouraged looking at all of those times.

### **Highlight safety, not swimming**

When talking about encouraging swim participation, Julia, a mom from Boston, highlighted a common perspective, "I think it's just the fact of children being able to save themselves in water. In the event that they are in a pool or on a beach or somewhere and um save someone else and then you could probably advance some but I think just swimming techniques of floating and being able to do a crawl to get from the deep end to the other end I would encourage all parents to um teach their children or bring their kids somewhere to learn to swim."

In another conversation in Boston, Sharyl stated, "I think we need to educate the parents of the importance of swimming as a life saving skill. I don't know what vehicle to do that but I think certainly economics plays a part but you really have to change people's concepts. You know they just don't really value swimming as an important life saving skill. Cause they didn't swim. They survived. (They think), 'So why do I need to bother?'"

Jonah then said, "With basketball and soccer you don't have the safety issue. You can go out and play basketball if you don't know everything about it, you can play basketball and learn it and with swimming you can't just go out to a 10-foot pool and jump in and teach yourself how to do it."

### **Pools in schools**

Some parents advocated mandatory swimming lessons in the public school curriculum. A mom from Denver stated, "They don't have it in schools anymore, just like drivers ed., and those are key things they need to know how to swim and they need to know how to drive." A mom from Boston agreed, "I think if they put pools back in schools... I think it would help."

Boston parent:

I think it is a mindset that we have to change in ways that which we can involve the parents in the schools because when a school puts a rule on that it's mandatory that students learn how to swim there are a couple school systems that it is mandatory that you do swimming in order to graduate from high school and so I think that allowing in the community pool can be used so that it's not a cost that low income families cannot afford. I think educating parents through the school because that's where their children spend a lot of time throughout the day and that's where parents come to meetings and if you had a community meeting about learning to swim you' get a few. But through the educational system you can truly reach a mass of people, more than with a community outreach.

Felicity believed swimming should be incorporated into the public school curriculum. She explained, "We have a pool in our neighborhood and we are trying to match the families and make it a part of the curriculum through one of the coaches here. He has been coming to our school... and speaking to the children and trying to recruit children to bring them over here. But again it takes transportation. If it could be part of the school day rather than after school then it would be more effective, you know. Because if you are talking about after school you are now relying on the parents and they may not have transportation or they may have children doing other things. You know if it were part of the school day you know once a week that would be fabulous. So I totally agree it should be part of the school day rather than after school like their physical activity class once a week."

Olga also expressed this desire: "That's why I mentioned the after school piece of it....I can get my parents to do it because some of them don't have the time so if we're doing swim lessons maybe once a week or twice a week while they're here, a lot of kids will be interested because they like the pool, they like swimming and a lot of the parents don't have the money to do it and that's sometimes why they say no."

## **Meetings and media**

To successfully generate interest in swim programs, Donna suggested, “Maybe like [having] an open house. Where you can at least have someone to talk to the parents, [explaining] you can save a child’s life just by getting them to swim. I think if they can have an open house they can have someone from nutrition, someone from dental, someone for firefighters. Have someone there to talk to parents about swimming and give out some information.”

Donna also suggested informing parents and using a popular character to influence opinions: “Have a little meeting, instructions with a DVD. Make it fun because my kids eat vegetables because Elmo said so! I’ve been saying eat them for the longest time.”

Dierdre, a Boston mom, also advocated finding a way to interest kids: “You have to get to the kids first. The kids have to be nagging. If my child is nagging. If your kids coming up to you “I wanna swim. I wanna swim” everyday. One day you’re going to be like ok. At least I’ll go and hear about it.”

In San Diego, Lupe, whose daughter is on the swim team, conveyed some frustration in the marketing of the swim team, explaining, “On the TV (in the front lobby), you saw a video of taekwondo and basketball, but since we’ve got it, they haven’t put anything of the swim team...We keep asking them for a promotion for the swim team...”

Karmen, an Atlanta mom, talked with other members of her focus group about the effectiveness of a video she had previously viewed:

Did ya’ll ever see that video where the neighbor was teaching that baby to swim so if they were to fall in fully clothed they could make it back to the top. They had taught the baby how to just kick and float on his back. I don’t know what the video’s called but somebody e-mailed it to me one day... Did ya’ll see that....It’s a video where... it’s scary because all you see is a baby falling into a pool-- fully dressed, shoes and everything and goes to the bottom and he kicks, and just

kicks and comes back up and floats on his back. That's what they're teaching kids so if they fall into a pool fully dressed...

One mother, Isabel, from San Diego shared that sending out fliers did not seem effective. The translator of this focus group, who was also a YMCA staff member then offered, "Our YMCA sends fliers to all the schools, I would know, I do all the flyers.... Lots of them...I would say every season we send out about, maybe more than 3000 and that's to each school. The discussion then began to address ways to get people interested in swimming. Speaking with the assistance of a translator, some of the Spanish speaking individuals disclosed that demonstration would be effective. The translator stated that Lupe, the mom of a swim team member "actually showed [friends, relatives, and neighbors] videos of her daughter swimming and she actually made them come just by that, just by them knowing, if in the community, that can happen to anyone."

### **Encourage realistic expectations**

Macy from Boston admitted, "I actually really want both my kids to be able to swim very very well and they're not there yet but I'm comfortable with where they're at."

Robert, and Atlanta dad, explained that his younger son still had some learning to do, but he accepted this and was patient: "I don't think he would be able to get to the side without some assistance. Because again at their level of swim class he is just getting comfortable with the water and they do the floats and things like that. My 8-year-old, he can float comfortably in any level of water and my 5 year old is still playing in the water. He is still with the float boards and kick boards and things like that. So he is not at that stage yet."

Interviewer: But in a few years?

Robert: Yes.

Interviewer: You are kind of working up to that?

Robert: Yes. And we will continue their swim lessons in the summer time. And the next summer Jeff will be in the next age group. And our assumption is by the end of the summer he will be a swimmer.

### **More pool time: Fewer weeks with more lessons**

In Boston, the conversation included ideas about the optimal way to offer lessons. One caregiver stated, “You figure if you have eight lessons, instead of making it eight weeks you make those lessons more compact and that’s something that they should probably look at. Would we be more effective if we compacted the lessons? Eight weeks of lessons in a two or three week period where they have 2 (lessons) one week and 3 the next and 2 the final week.”

Another parent confirmed this idea, stating:

When a kids studies something in school he goes home and can practice because academically that’s what you do. But with swimming, it’s not the same and I think that is something they should do. I think they need more sections, more days during that week because the thing is one day, (then) they have to come back the next week and the kid has forgotten what they need to do and they are not catching it right away.... You need to, I think, work in a way where kids can have more time in the pool in that week in more sections.

The interviewer then asked, “So even four weeks two times a week can be better than eight weeks once per week?” and a parent replied, “ That’s right, the more repetitive it is the better.”

### **Competent instructors and age-appropriate lessons**

The swim instructor’s demeanor and expertise was important to a number of parents. Additionally, parents expressed a desire for consistency in instructors rather than having numerous, “interchangeable” instructors.

Karmen offered, "I think (my daughter) is funny. She's weird about instructors, if the instructor switched, she wouldn't have it. But now she's ok in the pool."

A necessity for Nan, from Boston, is "...a quality instructor... you can't just take someone that used to coach a swim team for children 12-15 because you can deal with those children on a different level than you can deal with a 6-month-old to a 6-year-old. You have to have a whole certain level of age appropriate knowledge, how to deal with it, even how to talk to them, like if you're a swim team coach and your drilling people and then you have a 3-year old group you know is going to have some tendency. You can't drill a 3-year old the way you can drill a 12-year old."

Celeste from Minneapolis, described her son who is "six foot (tall), (age) 17, and he's got a full beard on." She volunteered, "He's just so afraid that he's going to get knocked into the pool by one of these little crazy kids high on sugar. If they get knocked in they get knocked in it doesn't matter who knocks them in. So we are really cautious about that.... There's not a whole lot of classes that my son can fit in comfortably." When the interviewer responded, "It almost seems like he should have an individual lesson, private lesson," Celeste countered, "Right and that is way out of my budget."

Marlene, also described the difficulty concerning swim lessons for an older child. She has a 12-year-old who cannot swim, and offered, "Maybe if someone had lessons and had somebody that would hold him in the water until he gets the feel. Then he might accept it better. I'm not sure."

I think that having instructors that can deal with younger children on an age appropriate level is important. I think it's really important.

Sylvia revealed, "I put my son in swim lessons and on the first day the guy had him put his face in the water and that did it for him. He was like 'No.' And he cried. And he wouldn't go back in... He was afraid to go back."

### **Affordable lessons**

Felicity stated, “Because there are a lot of our (African American) children from low income families and they really can’t afford it and a lot of these ... so we have to offer some free programs and get it out there to the parents that yes your kids can learn to swim and at no charge at no cost or whatever. That’s why I feel should happen.”

Xavier responded, “Or at an affordable price.”

Felicity: “Yeah an affordable price. We’re really dealing with some low, low, low income families. We’re dealing with some families that don’t know where their food or their next meal is coming from. So you have to offer them something. And another thing you can do too is offer them child care ...have some place where they can put their little ones while they take their older ones to the swimming pool. “

A member of another focus group, Liane revealed, “I started coming because the classes were reasonable. They were like 30 something dollars. Now it has gone up, which I still go but by now I’m like ‘Ok, I really want this so I’ll’...”

Sharyl confirmed that although a lack of finances as well as other structure constraints do exist these are not the only factors holding African Americans back: “We need more opportunities for families so that they can learn to swim, educate the parents about the importance because certainly economics plays a large factor in it. But again it’s the mindset that we have to change.”

### **Sliding fee scale for lessons**

Some focus group participants expressed a desire to have the income based sliding payment scale that is utilized to determine membership fees also be used to determine fees for swim class. One mother shared, “You can join the Y, you can buy a membership, apply for the personal pricing, or used to be called financial aid, for your membership, but then swim lessons are separate. You can’t get the personal pricing for

the swim lessons; and I think if you can do personal pricing for the swim lessons, oh there'd be a ton of people that'd be doing swim lessons, easily..." Another Minnesota focus group participant shared that it was obvious who could, and could not, afford lessons: "And you can just see, that some people can afford it and you're like, ya know, some people can't afford it." Yet another mom from Minnesota stated, "If the black people is not making it, it should be like a way you put them on to a program that they can afford, and everybody feel equal."

### **Free lessons as a "loss leader"**

A mom in Boston suggested, "It would be a good idea if they wanted to help the population to give free swim lessons from like zero months to two then start charging for them after that and that way maybe you will have more swimmers."

Another parent suggested, "If you got the first 2 lessons free and then you pay for 5 lessons; you know, something that is in your membership that says, as a member, your child can have a free lesson, or 2 free lessons... I think that might draw people to pay for swim lessons."

The YMCA in San Diego was a recipient of a grant that allowed them to offer free swimming lessons for one month per year. The staff member participating as a translator in the focus group revealed, "Once they see that word free, they jump on it...and they could only do it for a week, and parents believe... that after one week, they think they're child would be fine...They come to the free event, and then after they're one week, they no longer come."

The interviewer then asked, "You said that once that week expires, that's when they don't continue...because there is some kind of cost involved?"

The YMCA staff member responded: "Yeah. It's the cost. They usually always ask me or the others, if we can sign them up again...and we say 'no' because for that month, the four weeks, it's always the same thing... but it's the cost, it's the money..."

Interviewer: “I’m trying to get a good grasp....because I think the marketing term for it would be ‘loss leader,’ where you’d put out a free lesson...what is the number that continues? What percentage?”

YMCA Staff Member: “Maybe 25%.”

The interviewer also asked the San Diego YMCA swim team coach, “What happens during that week?”

Swim Coach: Basically, we teach them how to float...and it’s really impossible to say what child is going to learn how to float quickly, and which child comes in with phobias...

Interviewer: So should the program be longer?

Swim Coach: It has to be longer.

### **Other incentives**

Incentives were mentioned such as discounts if a member convinced another member to sign up for swim lessons. Also, for families with multiple children, providing a price break if more than one child took swimming lessons would allow families to provide lessons for all of their children rather than having to choose who gets the lesson.

Additionally, a mom in Minneapolis provided a specific suggestion, “I think incentives too, for finishing lessons would be another...If at the end, if you finish all 10 lessons, you might, I don’t know, you might get something. You know, I just can’t afford \$30 for each session.”

### **Timing of lessons**

Olivia, another YMCA employee as well as a parent, stated, “With my experience here at the Y running it at the school program for several years now, all based on experience a lot of parents don’t have the time also to...you know they come from work, they’re grabbing their kids, they’re running. Maybe (the YMCA) offering swim lessons during after school hours, because that way we’ll know that all the kids that want to do it would do it.”

A parent in Minneapolis who also worked in childcare informed the group, “For our daycare, we used to offer swim lessons for our kids in the daycare for free, so as staff, all we had to do was take the kids out to the pool, so that eliminated, like ‘I’m busy, I don’t have time at night.’”

### **Providing information through health care providers**

Xavier shared how he would like to see information provided about the benefits of swimming lessons: “Through health care. You know it’s an exercise that works the whole body and it’s an exercise that you use when you are young and it helps you when you are older.”

Donna shared that in her employment for the Woman, Infant, Child (WIC) program, a federally funded program, she provides counseling and assistance for breastfeeding mothers. She aptly related the conversations she has had with post-partum women to conversations that need to be held about swimming and water safety with parents of young children. She revealed, “Moms have come and said I don’t want to breast feed. They tell me it hurts. I don’t want it, I want formula.... I’m going to talk to them about me being a mommy. If I feel like they really want to breastfeed. I’ll tell them, ‘Listen I had the same fear. I have two daughters.’ You can see my girls’ pictures in my office... And I’ll talk to them about my fear that I used to have and my experience that I ended up nursing my second daughter for one year and my first daughter for three months because I had the fear and it was hurting she was not latching on. So I’ll show them, even if it takes me twenty minutes more, half an hour extra and I’ll sit there and talk to them parent to parent. And then they’ll walk out with no formula and they’ll breast feed their babies. I’ll give them a pump. I’ll give them everything they needed. They’ll come back and they’ll breast feed them... I think to reach out to the parents, you have to a place where they’ll listen to whoever that’s talking to them.”

Donna was successful in influencing parents because she could relate to them as she had similar experiences. She advocated having parents talk to someone they are

comfortable with and thought that education about the benefits of teaching a child to swim or be water safe was similar to teaching a woman about the benefits of breast feeding. The conversation in this focus group also led to ways healthcare providers could assist in encouraging swimming participation and water safety.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, four major categories with underlying themes, emerged from focus group responses regarding swimming participation in disenfranchised neighborhoods; *swimming access, parental perceptions that hinder swimming participation, parental perceptions that encourage swimming participation, and strategies to increase minority participation in swimming.* These prevailing topic areas and associated aspects correspond well with information gleaned from the quantitative findings, and verified the hard numbers with melodious discussion.

In closing, there were countless times when the focus group responses gave members of the research team moments of surprise and awe. Their “answers from the pool deck” were clever and straightforward, and plainly distinguished that they were the experts. Becoming a competent swimmer is a complex issue, very much a bi-polar circumstance which can range from one pole of “serious” (drowning) to the other pole of “trivial” (the joy of just splashing around). This complex issue was continuously dissected during the approximately 15 hours of 10 group discussions with 72 participants who gave exceptional reactions and solutions from the “trenches.” We feel very fortunate that these informative individuals enlightened us about the problem from their point of view, within their environments, and unmistakably deliberated remedies to increase diversity into a physical activity (& sport) that has little. More importantly, these “voices” and effective implementation of their solutions could save lives.

## **APPENDIX A**

**USA Swimming  
Parent Focus Group Protocol**

**FOCUS GROUP A: Has swimming child(ren)**

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. Welcome/Thank you**
- 2. Researcher Introduction and Overview**
  - a. Researcher introduces self/representing the University of Memphis
  - b. Purpose: Collecting opinions of parents about child's swimming participation
  - c. Will sign a consent form
  - d. Complete a form telling us a bit about you.
  - e. Will introduce yourself to the group
  - f. Participate in an interview that will last about 45 to 50 minutes
- 3. Consent Forms**
  - a. Go over with participants/collect signatures
  - b. Audio and Video taped; Stress confidentiality, pseudonyms
- 4. Participant introductions** (Names; age of child discussing?)
- 5. Complete the Parent Information Form**
- 6. Interview** (45-50 minutes)

**INTERVIEW:**

**I. YOU ARE IN THIS GROUP BECAUSE YOUR CHILD IS A SWIMMER. The following questions are about your child's swimming ability and involvement.**

**[RESEARCHER NOTE: Some Things to Look For: Norms/ Lack of Opportunity/Cost/Access to Facility/Setting Elements/ Cost/Lack of Time/Transportation/Safety/Personality/Attitudes**

1. Why does your child swim?
2. Did you encourage your child to learn to swim? (Social support)
3. Does your child have friends that swim? (Social support)
4. Is there a swimming facility near your home? (if not at YMCA) (Access)
5. What is this facility like?
  - a. Do you think the facility is safe? (Safety)
  - b. Do you think it is in good condition? (Safety)
  - c. Do you feel welcome/comfortable at this facility? Other facilities? (Perceived Discrimination)
6. Has your child ever taken formal swim lessons? Describe. (Ability/Safety/Cost)

**If YES:**

- a. How did your child get to swimming lessons? (Access)

- i. Did a parent bring the child?
- ii. Did relatives/friends bring the child?
- iii. Other?

**If NO:**

- a. Could a parent bring the child?
- b. Could a relative/friend bring the child?
- c. Other?
- 7. Would you describe your child as physically fit?
- 8. What are your child's favorite activities?
- 9. Could your child keep his or her head above water and stay afloat if he/she fell into deep water? (Safety)
- 10. How do you feel about having your child participate in swimming? (Social Support)
- 11. Are you ever worried about your child drowning or being injured while swimming? (Safety)
  - a. Is there an environment that worries you more than another? Please explain.
  - b. What would make you less worried?
  - c. Does having a lifeguard matter?

**II. PARENT'S SWIMMING INVOLVEMENT/ABILITY**

➤ **Tell me about your swimming ability. Do you know how to swim?**

**If YES:**

- 1. How confident are you in the water? ( e.g. deep end vs. shallow end of a pool)
- 2. How old were you when you learned? Who taught you?
- 2. Did other people in your family swim?
- 4. Do you still swim on a regular basis?
- 5. Have you ever been swimming with your child(ren)?

**If NO:**

- 1. Is there a reason you never learned?
- 2. Did other people in your family swim?
- 3. Would you like to learn? Why or why not?
- 4. Have you ever taken your child(ren) swimming? Where? How often?

**III. CLOSING (DROWNING; SOCIAL NORMS; SUGGESTIONS)**

- 1. Some researchers have found that minority children (specifically African American and Hispanic/Latino children) drown more often than Caucasian children. What do you think about this?
- 2. What would help lessen the higher rates of drowning deaths among minority children?
  - a. Would your child be interested in swimming if he/she could? What would help/make this possible? Specific...
  - b. What would be too much for you to pay for a one-hour swimming lesson? (Suggest amounts if no answer-- \$5, \$10, \$15, \$20)

3. Some researchers have asked if swimming is a White activity. What do you think?
4. Do you have anything else to share that we did not already discuss or you would like to expand upon ?

**Thank you for time and participation!**

From USA Swimming Report: 62% African American and 44% Hispanic subjects registered limited swimming ability, while only 32% white subjects conveyed limited ability to swim. From Memphis Report: 58% of African American children and 56% Hispanic/Latino children are “at risk” swimmers (were unable to swim or were comfortable in shallow end only) as compared to 31% of white children.

**USA Swimming  
Parent Focus Group Protocol**

**FOCUS GROUP B: Has non-swimming child(ren)**

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. Welcome/Thank you**
- 2. Researcher Introduction and Overview**
  - a. Researcher introduces self/representing the University of Memphis
  - b. Purpose: Collecting opinions of parents about child's swimming participation
  - c. Will sign a consent form
  - d. Complete a form telling us a bit about you.
  - e. Will introduce yourself to the group
  - f. Participate in an interview that will last about 45 to 50 minutes
- 3. Consent Forms**
  - a. Go over with participants/collect signatures
  - b. Audio and Video taped; Stress confidentiality, pseudonyms
- 4. Participant introductions** (Names; age of child discussing?)
- 5. Complete the Parent Information Form**
- 6. Interview** (45-50 minutes)

**INTERVIEW:**

**I. YOU ARE IN THIS GROUP BECAUSE YOUR CHILD IS NOT A SWIMMER. The following questions are about your child's swimming ability and involvement.**

**[RESEARCHER NOTE: Some Things to Look For: Norms/ Lack of Opportunity/Cost/Access to Facility/Setting Elements/ Cost/Lack of Time/Transportation/Safety/Personality/Attitudes**

12. Why doesn't your child swim?
13. Would you like your child to learn to swim? (Social support)
14. Does your child have friends that swim? (Social support)
15. Is there a swimming facility near your home? (if not at YMCA) (Access)
16. What is this facility like?
  - a. Do you think the facility is safe? (Safety)
  - b. Do you think it is in good condition? (Safety)
  - c. Do you feel welcome/comfortable at this facility? Other facilities? (Perceived Discrimination)
17. Has your child ever taken formal swim lessons? Describe. (Ability/Safety/Cost)

**If YES:**

- a. How did your child get to swimming lessons? (Access)

- i. Did a parent bring the child?
- ii. Did relatives/friends bring the child?
- iii. Other?

**If NO:**

- a. Could a parent bring the child?
  - b. Could a relative/friend bring the child?
  - c. Other?
18. Would you describe your child as physically fit?
  19. What are your child's favorite activities?
  20. Could your child keep his or her head above water and stay afloat if he/she fell into deep water?
  21. How do you feel about having your child participate in swimming?
  22. Are you ever worried about your child drowning or being injured while swimming?
    - d. Is there an environment that worries you more than another? Please explain.
    - e. What would make you less worried?
    - f. Does having a lifeguard matter?

**IV. PARENT'S SWIMMING INVOLVEMENT/ABILITY**

➤ **Tell me about your swimming ability. Do you know how to swim?**

**If YES:**

1. How confident are you in the water? (e.g. deep end vs. shallow end of a pool)
2. How old were you when you learned? Who taught you?
2. Did other people in your family swim?
4. Do you still swim on a regular basis?
5. Have you ever been swimming with your child(ren)?

**If NO:**

1. Is there a reason you never learned?
2. Did other people in your family swim?
3. Would you like to learn? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever taken your child(ren) swimming? Where? How often?

**V. CLOSING (DROWNING; SOCIAL NORMS; SUGGESTIONS)**

5. Some researchers have found that minority children (specifically African American and Hispanic/Latino children) drown more often than Caucasian children. What do you think about this?
6. What would help lessen the higher rates of drowning deaths among minority children?
  - c. Would your child be interested in swimming if he/she could? What would help/make this possible? Specific...
  - d. What would be too much for you to pay for a one-hour swimming lesson? (Suggest amounts if no answer-- \$5, \$10, \$15, \$20)

7. Some researchers have asked if swimming is a White activity. What do you think?
8. Do you have anything else to share that we did not already discuss or you would like to expand upon?

**Thank you for time and participation!**

From USA Swimming Report: Racial inequalities were noteworthy in this study with 62% African American and 44% Hispanic subjects registered limited swimming ability, while only 32% white subjects conveyed limited ability to swim. In 2008, USA Swimming, along with a research team from the University of Memphis Department of Health and Sport Sciences and the YMCA of the USA, sponsored a nationwide study which, for the first time, revealed approximately 58% of African American children and 56% Hispanic/Latino children are “at risk” swimmers (were unable to swim or were comfortable in shallow end only) as compared to 31% of white children.