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## SWIMMING INTO OLYMPISM AND SAVING LIVES

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## **SUMMARY**

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### **SWIMMING INTO OLYMPISM AND SAVING LIVES**

Swimming is more than a sport. It is a lifeline both in and out of the water. Yet more children die each year as a result of drowning. Swimming, needs to diversify its efforts to save more lives and create positive change both physically and metaphorically for the all of humankind. As the drowning epidemic continues to claim more lives each day, it is evident that there is a global need to stop the drowning epidemic. The current lack of diversity and evident racial disparities are apparent in the waters of American competitive swimming and are quite alarming. To address the future of swimming's legacy, we glimpse at the sports past to show the power of social change can transcend through sport. A global campaign to save lives through water safety programs and learn to swim educational programs has been discussed but not fully implemented among nations. It is known that learning to swim must be accessible to every man, woman, and child, but the sport is lagging behind. Notably, the sport of swimming has shown to have had influence on gender equality in its formative years and now the sport is shedding light on the racial and socio-economic disparities that are now present in the waters. Inclusion and diversity within the sport of swimming may broaden our aquatic horizons, as individuals, global citizens, including benefiting the overall health of the individual and that of the planet. Water is life just as swimming life, as it is the one sport that can save lives.

Keywords: Swimming education, Equality, Diversity, Safety

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## **ABSTRACT**

Swimming has long been deeply rooted in the history of human nature and its culture is influenced by societal norms at large as well as influencing and challenging these conceptions. The state of the world can often be mirrored in the waters we swim reflecting societal norms and conventions within any particular culture at any given time in history. Swimming can be utilized for multiple purposes like exercise, health, competition, recreation, and survival. Sadly, there is a large percentage of people who cannot actually swim, even if their life depended on it. Included in this percentage are certain ethnic and socioeconomic populations that are especially impacted by their lack of swimming skills. In many minority and special needs communities, drowning has become a growing epidemic and is claiming underserved lives across the world. Drowning currently kills more poor children than ever before, yet could be solved by cooperative initiatives for diversity and inclusion within the swimming community.

This preventable public health crisis kills millions each year and is perpetuated by factors such as the high costs associated with the sport, cultural stereotypes, even the right to accessibility to clean and safe water. The power of swimming is transformational and recommended for childhood health and development, yet water safety remains elusive to so many children around the globe as evidenced by the rise and fear of the global drowning epidemic. The swimming community and all its stakeholders need to rally their pioneers and ambassadors for the sport, once again, to swim upstream, united together against the resistance of current cultural prejudices and fatal misconceptions that continue to deny the holistic benefits of swimming.

This paper will examine the benefits of swimming and show that teaching young people to swim will lead to improved physical and physiological outcomes for the individual swimmers, to reduced numbers of drowning fatalities, and to improved conditions for the planet. Swimming is not just a sport, or healthful activity, it is survival skill, a tool for enhancing the quality of life. Swimming, a life skill that is for the sake of our survival, as well as, for the joy and well-being of

humanity, just as it is for conserving the environmental health of our future and planet. Water is paramount for survival yet the drowning risks are real. The disparities between race and gender statistics are known, so it is time to shed light on the murky waters that have kept swim education elusive and drowning risks on the rise in the many segments of the population one splash at a time. It is time to revisit the notion that swimming is far more than a sport, it is a life skill that is a basic human right that every man, woman and child has the right to learn as well as enjoy for a healthier life.

## INTRODUCTION

“If you aren’t a swimmer, an ex-swimmer, a coach, a swim parent or a chlorine addict, the only time you watch competitive swimming is during the Olympics. Every four years, the world sits down in front of their televisions, and watches as generations of great swimmers rise to the top of the podium” (Hardwick, 2014, p.1). One does not have to be a super fan or super star athlete to understand the power of swimming. And one does not need to become a competitive Olympic swimmer to learn how to swim. Swimming is relevant for each and every one of us, and it is the only sport that can save a life. Therefore, it is critical to pass on the knowledge and water safety skills in clear preventative guidelines to expose all demographics to the sport of swimming. It is time to stop drowning deaths and highlight the physical activity of swimming as a means to achieving this goal. It is paramount that learn-to-swim and water safety initiatives be affordable and easily accessible for all of the diverse populations in need.

Swimming has generated a big splash for inclusiveness since the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, and although women were not participants at this time, FINA, The International Swimming Federation, the governing body of this sport, quickly recognized the need for equality in its waters. FINA has long leveled disparities among gender in competitive swimming and has worked to level the waters within the sport, and now must pursue racial disparity within the sport. Sports have been known to engage the public masses and so can bring change outside of the field, arena, even the competition pool and swimming has certainly paved the way for equal opportunity and representation in the pool. Beginning with the issue of gender equality in competitive swimming since the 1900’s, FINA has demonstrated the ability to change norms through the sport alone, of course with heroic leading ladies such as English Channel swimmer Gertrude Ederle, as well as Annette Kellerman.

As women made progress in the sport of swimming, one pioneer in the sport stands out-Annette Kellerman. She an Australian native, born in 1877, who reinvented the very conventions of fashions towards women and aquatics. She used to aquatics for therapy and relief from pain she suffered as a child. Kellerman was freer to move about in the water with fluidity without the constrictions of her leg braces. Kellerman wore a male one-piece swimsuit that allowed her to move more efficiently through the water with less drag. At that time, it was

customary practice for wool skirts to be worn by women for appropriate modest coverage. Suits were definitely not well designed for either safety or speed (Fritscher, 2014). “They wore heavy, cumbersome bathing costumes that allowed them to splash in shallow water but dragged them down in deeper or rougher seas” (Fritscher, 2014). Kellerman’s spectacle in Boston got her arrested for indecent exposure because her swimsuit revealed her thigh. She ended up winning in court and changed the swim styles for women. This arrest promoted positive press, and variations of her scandalous swim suit soon appeared on beaches around the world. This was an early testimony to the power of an individual and sport to initiate great change (Fritscher, 2014).

Over one hundred years ago swimming stereotypes on gender was addressed head on and swimming became much more equitable for all. “It took a half century for the female athlete participation rate to rise to over 10 percent” within the Olympic Games (Schaffer & Smith, 2000, p.117). Although there was steady growth in the rise of female participation, the limitations still reflected society’s discrimination against gender equality, much like the racial tensions still felt in America. “The progress made in sports parallels and oftentimes plays a leading role in the advance of women’s rights and women’s participation in other cultural institutions” (Schaffer & Smith, 2000, p.117), one could assert that the same for race and celebrate diversity in safe waters.

It is time once again to face the real racial disparities that have built up in American swimming. It is time to plunge into real strategies that will broaden the reach of affordable and widespread swim lessons along with advance prevention efforts that will help reduce drowning statistics among all populations. We must admit the need for inclusion of and diversity in swim education programs and bring them into compliance with twenty-first century goals that understand swimming to be more than sport- it is a human right that simultaneously becomes a metaphor for life. In fact, swimming can be shown to be the sport that serves as a constant barometer for the state of current affairs as reflected in political and cultural mindsets so it is vital that swimming embrace a diverse and inclusive community.

As the global epidemic of drowning continues to claim millions of lives across our planet it is urgent to educate the masses on water safety and provide formal swim instruction at an early age because swimming is more than a competitive sport, it is a life-saving tool, a gift that keeps



on giving. It teaches positive life skills, provides beneficial exercise and health improvements, tends to improve environmental conditions, and it even encourages the spirit of Olympism. “Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind” (Olympic Charter, 2014, p.13).

Swimming not only saves lives, but it indeed fosters Olympism because it is more than sport, it is a physical discipline that develops the body, the will, and the spirit when practiced. Swimming, as a physical activity can bridge the gap between the exclusivity of the competitive sporting culture and that of swimming as a life skill. Swimming has the transformative power to improve the body and mind of the growing child, and is even being recommended to children who have a range of diagnosed medical conditions. Swimming is prescribed as a means of complimentary and proactive treatments but most significantly, knowing how to swim can save lives. Swimming, more than a life-saving skill that can help reverse the global drowning epidemic it links us back to a primordial being who is reliant on water safety skills for survival. Water is vital for life just as swimming is therapeutic for life and now is the time to swim into equal and more peaceful waters. Swimming enhances our life skills and experiences both in and out of the water. It also reaffirms our connection to the planet and offers insight to humanity at large. Swimming is much more than a sport, it is life, just as water is life, and both our essential human rights.

Currently, there are over 7 billion people in the world living on a planet composed of 70% of water, and “children who are 100% curious” (YMCA.net, 2016, p.1), which is all too often why children are at an increased risk around water. Water is our birthright yet millions lose their life each year and water plays a role in these preventable deaths. Drowning, although preventable, continues to be a leading cause of death of young children worldwide, mainly in economically poor areas. Nearly 3 children die daily in the United States as a result of drowning and it will take a combination of methods from all stakeholders not only in sport, but from education and politics in order to have the greatest affect in reducing drowning mortalities across the population most at risk in America- youth, male, and minorities. (Center of Disease Control, 2012). It is time to broaden the horizons of the swimming landscape.

“Drowning is a serious and neglected public health threat claiming the lives of 372,000 people a year worldwide” (World Health Organization, 2014, p.1). This epidemic is preventable if swim instruction and

water safety education are made available and accessible at an early age to all regardless of socioeconomic status, yet there is no broad platform to address this epidemic. Swimming education with supervised formal practice is a key to reducing drowning deaths and non-fatal submersion injuries, as well as increasing our overall health for sustaining our human existence. Learn to swim programs are needed to improve the quality of children's lives and to decrease drowning rates, once and for all across diverse populations. Learn-to-swim programs address a mission to keep our youth afloat and fit for life, not only metaphorically, but physically, building stronger, safer communities while empowering the holistic development of the individual's overall well-being.

It is imperative that lifesaving skills and water safety prevention plans be passed down through generations via early education initiatives that address all potential risks around water. We are in the middle of an epidemic where water is claiming the lives of millions worldwide. As drowning rates increase and water scarcity creates conflict, the need to address water safety prevention is paramount. There is an urgency to act now and develop water safety prevention plans that can save lives. It is possible, with a collaborative push to dive into the buoyancy of safer waters for all. This paper will explore different aspects of swimming including its history and its culture and assess who is at risk and why. With education and diversity in swimming the world will be a safer place. Swimming is not simply a sport, as it has the transformative power to reconnects us to life, our planet, and fosters the growth of our human potential.

In America, swimming has long been a favorite pastime, yet most minority groups in America have not yet learned how to swim, even though Africans had long been revered for their excellent swimming skills. "As the temperatures rise with the summertime heat there is an influx of would be swimmers who ultimately may pay a high price as a result of little to no swim skills. There are large numbers of people who visit other local watering holes, such as pools, rivers, lakes, even irrigation ditches, not all will make it out alive. In fact, each year in the United States approximately 800 children will drown and two thirds of these drowning will occur during the summer months between May and August. (Safe Kids Worldwide, 2016). It is crucial that all those who seek time in the water, have the adequate means to minimize their risks of drowning including swim lessons, water safety and supervision. It is vital that swim programs are aimed at

all demographics and locations to truly be considered as an inclusive sport and break the cycle of the rising statistic that claims more minorities in America than ever before.

The United States of America is a diverse nation with a reputation for being among the strongest of Olympic swimming nations however, there has been little ethnic diversity in American swimming. Inclusion and diversity in and out of the pool is vital in these racially heated times. History was made at the Olympics in Rio 2016 with new faces of ethnic diversity representing America's best swimmers. The significance of the first African-American to win an Olympic Gold medal is monumentally impactful for future swimmers and will hopefully increase diversity in American swimming, while saving lives one stroke at a time. Presently there is a push for more diversity in aquatics, and the culture of the sport is broadening its horizons to make swimming all-inclusive, and more far-reaching than simply competitive sport. It will take support from all governing and non-governing bodies both nationally and internationally to stop the worldwide drowning epidemic from continuing to swell in disproportionate measures.

The alarming number of non-swimmers that attributes to the momentum of the global drowning epidemic is quite a paradox, because essentially, we are all natural born swimmers. We all begin life floating in the warm liquid environment of our mother's womb, a fluid and weightless environment. It is only natural then to presume that babies are born with a natural kinship for life in water and suggests that the action of floating in a warm pool of water can feel more familiar to a newborn than actually being on dry land (Infant Swimming Resource, 2015). "A baby is the beginning of all things - wonder, hope, a dream of possibilities. In a world that is cutting down trees to build highways and losing its earth to concrete, babies are almost the only remaining link with the natural world or the living things from which we spring" (Water Birth International, 2010, p.1).

Our instinctual familiarity and affinity to water calls for our return to its supporting embrace so that we may not sink, but swim into a better state of existence for all of humankind. Whether in a pool or natural body of water, the mechanics of how the body moves must be taught through exposure and practice at learning how to swim. As stated by Michael Phelps, swimming's most recognizable superstar, "Swimming is normal for me. I'm relaxed. I'm comfortable, and I know my surroundings. It's my home" (Swimming Quotes, n.d., p.1). Yet water often remains an

elusive environment for many and even though the swimmer's environment is fluid and free of gravitational pull, unlike the heavy burden of life on land, many simply sink into the depths.

This fore-mentioned statement is suggestive of the fact that swimming in water can bring us back to a more natural and balanced state of well-being. Swimming is a practice that encompasses the six dimensions of wellness as created by Doctor Bill Hettler, of the National Wellness Institute. Hettler's independent wellness model incorporates wellness defined as a balance of six components of life: occupational, physical, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual and by antidotal evidence and personal practice, swimming exemplifies all six dimensions completely.

Swimmers, myself included, often find themselves pursuing a line of work as coaches, teachers, and mentors fulfilling the occupational component of one's self. Other occupations that require swimming competency include Policeman, Fireman, EMS Tech, Lifeguard, Swim Teacher, Marine Biologist, Underwater Photographer, etc. as well as all arms of the military. The physical activity of swimming provides benefits to the body's muscular and skeletal system and is often prescribed for its therapeutic rehabilitation purposes for people of all ages. Swimming, often considered a solo sport, is in fact very much team and family oriented, making it a positive social environment for all ages. Emotionally, and spiritually speaking, swimmers must let go of any resistance and trust the water which brings a tranquility over all of the senses. When suspended in a calm float, pure relaxation is practiced. Last but not least, swimming stimulates our intelligence and beginning research from Griffith University in Australia is proving that swimming does make children smarter (Jorgensen, 2013)

The conclusive reality for all of humankind is that water equals life. As such, water will give life to the swimmer. Water provides for the needs of the swimmer, just as the swimmer must provide for the needs of the environment. This connection to the aquatic environment is an integral and symbiotic partnership that must be protected. It is important to diversify the face of swimming culture so that the benefits of swimming can be experienced by all, not just by those who are financially able. Swimming is an integral part of the human condition and has been experienced since the dawn of time across many diverse populations, yet is presently divided and restricted by race and economics in America.

“While drowning is a leading cause of death worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, prevention is possible. Evidence shows that a range of interventions are effective at preventing drowning. Among others, these include the strategic use of barriers to control access to water, provision of safe places such as day care centres for pre-school children, and teaching school-age children basic swimming skills” (World Health Organization, 2014, p.iii). Swimming is a tool for our survival and it also positively affects the growth of a developing mind, body and soul at any age. Swimming can bring meaning to our human condition and guide us in the preparation for life. Having basic aquatic skills can be the difference between life and death by drowning. Unfortunately, many people are never taught to swim as children and subsequently their children may also never learn. Lack of exposure to the sport whether due to cultural stereotypes or historically laid misconceptions, as well as financial constraints, seems to be perpetuating this preventable epidemic.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **SWIMMING: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Learning how to swim is nothing new and swimming education has been happening from ancient times. The awareness of our need for water and its role in the progress and development of great civilizations has been of great importance and swimming was an essential skill for life as evident from the beginning of recorded history. The importance of swimming has long been connected as a metaphor for how to live, as found in ancient texts and most major religions. Evident from religious teachings and historical accounts, “life lessons from swimming permeate the foundations of our society” (Sherr, 2012, p.9). Water is a symbol throughout many religions and is thought to cleanse the spirit as well as being the foundation of life. “The significance of water manifests itself differently in different religions and beliefs but it is these two qualities of water that underlie its place in our cultures and faiths” (Abrams, 2000, p.1). Swimming thus can bring a connection to our inner peace through its ties to religious teachings.

Exemplifying the significance of water in religion can be seen in daily rituals, teachings, and in places of worship. In the Jewish faith, Rabbis say that teaching a child to swim is an essential component in the preparation of life. Jewish rabbis advise, “according to the Talmud (the fourth-

century rabbinic legal code), parents are required to teach their children Torah (the five books of Moses), a trade, and to swim” (Baesh, 2006, p.1). Hinduism views all water as sacred, especially its seven sacred rivers, most notably the Ganges River. “It is believed that those who bathe in the Ganges and those who leave some part of themselves (hair, bone etc.) on the left bank will attain *Svarga* (the paradise of Indra)” (Abrams, 2000, p.1). Christianity uses water in their sacraments such as baptism and confirmation, symbolizing the power of water in our lives at pivotal times in one’s life. “It cleanses and washes away dirt, fills everything it enters as God fills those who are immersed in Him and we need water to survive physically as we need God to survive spiritually” (Abrams, 2000, p.1). Water sustains life and is symbolic in religious rituals and ceremony. Water also gives life to swimming.

Swimming is deeply rooted in history and mythology and was also prevalent in Classical Greek society. Swimming was taught for militia survival as well as recreation during this time. “Babylonian bas-reliefs and Assyrian wall drawings point to very early swimming skills among humans” (FINA, n.d., p.1). These images of ancient swimmers date back thousands of years which support the idea that swimming has always permeated human culture and life. “Swimming can be dated back to the Stone Age, but did not truly become an organised sport until the early 19th century” (Swimming Equipment and History, 2015, p.1). Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, swimming was a wartime survival tactic. Socrates said, “Swimming saves a man from death” (Sherr, 2012, p.16). Aquatic skills were taught as a tactic of warfare survival. Herodotus wrote, “Of the Greeks there died only a few, for, as they were able to swim” (Sherr, 2012, p.19). Clearly this indicates that swimming was indeed done for the pursuit of strength. Swimming showcased a society’s preparation for victory in life and battle.

To be able to swim was to be able to be triumphant. It was able to show love, as demonstrated by the story of the mythical figures of Leander and Hero. It was told that Leander swam across the Hellespont under the darkness each night to reunite with his forbidden lover Hero, virgin priestess of Aphrodite. He swam nightly guided by the light shining off her tower. Leander was making his usual swim trek on a fateful stormy night when Hero’s light was diminished. It was a tragic twist that left him drowned by the storm fed waters that once carried him safely to her. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). When a swimmer is in the water, transcendence happens. Engaging in movements in the water, or swimming, brings about an otherworldliness, an often

indescribable peace. Swimming should thus be seen as more than a competitive sport, recreational exercise or leisure activity; it becomes a metaphor for life that knows no boundaries of race, gender, nor religion. Change is the only thing that is constant and the culture of swimming has undergone its own metamorphosis. It is true that the passing of time and changes in ruling class and social constructs have greatly impacted swimming, both negatively and positively. Swimming almost became obsolete with puritan rule. “As swimming was done in a state of undress, it became less popular as society became more conservative, and it was opposed by the church at the end of the middle ages” (History of Swimming, 2007, p.1).

Swimming had a revival in the 16<sup>th</sup> century partly due to one of the first published manuals of the sport written by Reverend Digby of England. Digby’s book on swimming ‘*De Arte Natandi*’, *The Art of Swimming*, was printed in 1587 in Latin and translated into English 8 years later (Hodgman, 2011). “The work was hugely influential, not just providing a practical guide to staying afloat and different strokes but also in its attention to issues of safety” (The Art of swimming 1587, n.d., p.1). This illustrated manuscript on swimming instruction details proper open water safety knowledge and stroking skills in an open water environment as there were no man made pools at the time. The images show people floating, surface diving, existing and entering the water and many more illustrations done by woodcut printings, created by Digby himself (Hodgman, 2011).

“The male bathers populating Digby’s 40 plus woodcut illustrations are river swimmers. Ben Franklin, the inventor of swim fins and the only Founding Father to be inducted (posthumously) into the International Swimming Hall of Fame” (The Art of Swimming, 1587: A Manual with Woodcut Illustrations, 2014, p.1). Swimming has continually evolved and been reinvented. Swimming was revisited and stylized as more than a tactic of warfare and now is celebrated for leisure and recreational purposes. Digby’s book could be considered the ‘swimmer’s bible’ of its era and has given credence to the sports revival in popularity.

Swimming has undergone many technical advancements and stroke variations since Digby’s initial writings. All this adaptation in the water has led the sport of swimming into its current state of existence as being among the top viewed Olympic Sports. “Although humans have been swimming for thousands of years, swimming only became a competitive sport in the early 1800’s” (History of Swimming, 2016, p.1). The popularity and practice of the sport of swimming

continues to grow worldwide and is one of the oldest Olympic Sports on the Modern Olympic Program since 1896. Since 1896 when the first open water event was held, swimming has been at the forefront of radical progress for gender equality in sport.

### *Gender Equality*

Women's swimming had its start in the Olympics in 1912, at the Stockholm Games. "In the minutes of the 13th IOC Session (Luxembourg) published in the Olympic Review (June 1910), it was announced that women would undoubtedly be accepted for swimming at the Games of the V Olympiad, Stockholm 1912" (Swimming: participation during the history of the Olympic Games, 2011, p. 2). This idea of equal opportunity in the sport of swimming was progressive and very important in sport shaping culture and culture shaping sport. During the time frame from 1900-1908, seven International Sporting Federations had been formed, one of which was FINA, the International Amateur Swimming Federation (Platonov & Guskov, 1997). "The Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (FINA) was one of the first private sports organizations to provide girls and women a chance to develop more interest and enthusiasm for the Game" (McCray, 1996, p.22). FINA is the autonomous international governing body of swimming, diving, water polo, synchronized swimming and open water swimming. "The FINA's creation occurred in London in 1908 when the Committee of the Olympic Games decided that it was absolutely necessary to set out rules, which until then had not been defined, for the different Olympic sports" (Within the International Federations, 1976, p.311). This progressive change clearly demonstrated how swimming can impact the world.

Much to his chagrin, "the reviver of the Olympic Games Pierre de Coubertin ascribed to women only the role of enthusiastic spectator, someone who would show admiration towards the male athletes and honour them" (Skiadas, 1993, p. 13). Yet swimming broke the mold and it has been a strong discipline at every edition of the Games since and thankfully, Coubertin's way of thinking was not unanimous or strongly held. Since the first Modern Olympic Games at Athens in 1896, even present day, the program of the Olympic Games has been continually evolving to create more equal opportunities for both male and female participants. "Over time, the programme of the Games expanded, growing from around 40 events in 1896 to more than 120 at the 1924 Games in Paris" (The Programme of the Games of the Olympiad, 2013, p. 1). Coubertin may not have wanted the Olympics to shift this direction, but with the creation of autonomous sport federations, along



with powerful women pioneers and media attention, swimming does progress with the inclusion of women at the Modern Olympic Games.

By 1924 competitive swimming for women had occupied a fairly secure niche in the athletic scheme of things" (Pieroth, 1996, p.2). "It took a half century for the female athlete participation rate to rise to over 10 percent" within the Olympic Games (Schaffer & Smith, 2000, p.117). Although there was steady growth in the rise of female participation, the limitations still reflected society's discrimination against gender equality. "The progress made in sports parallels and oftentimes plays a leading role in the advance of women's rights and women's participation in other cultural institutions" (Schaffer & Smith, 2000, p.117). As time moved forward the fight for equality would continue for women in sports. Women in sport still had barriers to break. It took organizational support of Federations, compliance of a progressive IOC, and true pioneers that pushed the limits. Although the women's swimming program was not exactly equal to the men's events, it was a step in the right direction towards a better balance of gender equity.

However, economical and racial divide is still being felt within the waters which divide us. "During the early 1900's, social clubs for upper-income families sponsored events for their children. Daughters of the members trained for figure skating and swimming competitions. If the daughters showed interest and ability, they entered the Games" (McCray, 1996, p.22). So while the popularity of swimming grows among women, it still remains for the higher elites. This financial sporting advantage is quite parallel to the Ancient Olympic Games first female victor, Kyniska of Sparta, who took gold through her expensive fleet of horses in the chariot race in 396BC (Young, 2004, p.113). To be able to swim women had to have strong family lineage and financial support to help them compete in the sport, frightening familiar even today as costs prevent lessons which can save lives.

Today the men's and women's programs are almost identical, as they contain the same number of events, with only one difference: the freestyle distance is 800 meters for women and 1,500 meters for men (IOC, 2011). Today's Olympic Program consists of the four strokes: freestyle, backstroke, butterfly, and breaststroke and is comprised of 17 races for both men and women, including an open water swim race, a nod to the conditions swam in the first few Olympiads. Looking back at the swimming events of the first modern Olympic Games of 1896 which took place in the open waters of the Bay of Zea in the Piraeus as well as the Aegean Sea.

(Daland & Carlile, 2016). The 1896 Olympic champion for the mile swim faced big waves and cold waters of the Aegean Sea. This Olympic champion, a Hungarian named Alfred Hajos, is reported to have said, “I did not swim for the Olympic Gold Medal, I swam for my life” (Daland & Carlile, 2016, p.33), metaphorically speaking, swimming is life.

### *Swimming Pools*

Olympic swimming events continued to be in open water for many early Olympiads. In 1900, the Olympics were held in Paris, France where the swimming events were swum in the Seine River. Four years later the Games moved to St. Louis where a man-made lake was constructed for the swim races. Times were changing with the progress of the industrial age and swimming also began to see new developments that brought swimming from the open waters to the more ‘civilized’ pools. In 1908 at the London Games, “Bill Henry, Britain’s oldest swimmer, built a 100m by 15m course on the edge of the main stadium for the Olympic Games at Shepard’s Bush” (Daland & Carlile, 2016, p.34). This early shift from open water to pool competition has permeated a negative shift in American swimming consciousness, and unwilling helped propagate a racial divide in American swim culture.

Pools have definitely influenced the popularity of the sport of swimming, but subsequently, have made a negative impression on millions of African-Americans beginning during the frightful days of segregation. “In the south, Jim Crow laws kept Blacks out of public swimming pools and off the most desirable beaches and lakeside swimming spots. Some communities built “colored pools,” but there was no race mixing where black men could be in the same location as white women in bathing suits” (Pitts, 2008 p.1). Public pools in America became prevalent in the 1920’s and 1930’s which was a racially heated time of hate and discrimination of African-Americans, especially in the southern states. This racial divide is evident when looking at the culture of the history of hate at American swimming pools and seems to explain why many African-Americans did not grow up swimming, and continue to fear the unwelcoming waters as a result of racism.

This racially divided time in America’s past is when pools as big as football fields were built across the United States becoming hubs of recreation and leisure for like social classes to socialize. (Wiltse, The Bryan Park Project, 2008). “And yet, it was at that point in time that cities

began to racially segregate pools throughout the north, and it then extended, obviously, all throughout the United States. And black Americans were typically relegated, if a pool was provided at all, to a small indoor pool that wasn't nearly as appealing as the large, outdoor resort pools that were provided for whites" (Wiltse, 2008, p.1). A system that was meant to bring equality created yet another division between socio-economic classes and swimming. The socio-economic divide widens the gap across turbulent waters. "In the 1930s the Work Project Administration built "colored pools" and white pools and promoted swimming within both racial groups, but the number of pools built and opportunities for blacks were far from equal. Still, some blacks took advantage of the opportunities to swim, like future civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." (Pitts, 2008).

The demographics at pools shifted and many wealthy Americans stopped patronizing these public spaces as a direct result from "the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education* outlawed segregation. Public swimming facilities would either be closed or sold and privatized rather than accept integration" (Pitts, 2008, p.2). Instead, many built pools at their private clubs and even own backyards. Dr. Wiltse's research found "that in city after city after city, when a municipal pool became racially-desegregated, and so a court would order that the pool has to be open to blacks and whites without discrimination, what I found was that the overall attendance to the pool would plummet, and that, literally, the majority of whites who had been using the pool previously stopped using the municipal pools" (Wiltse, 2008, p.1). The decline of public swimming pools forced many African Americans to swim in less safe watering holes, where safety was often neglected and overlooked.

If any safe swimming places were open to African-Americans, they were all too often the conduit of hate and discrimination, especially in the swimming pool. Just four years prior the infamous black power salute at the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games, a horrific event occurred against African-Americans in a swimming pool, which imprinted a negative legacy that is still haunting. "On the morning of June 18, 1964, an extraordinary scene of civil disobedience was captured on camera in Saint Augustine, Florida. It made the front page of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and many other papers, in America and around the world. The pictures showed the owner of the "Whites Only" Monson Motor Lodge pouring acid into a swimming

pool where men and women, black and white, had committed an act of "instant integration" by entering the pool together" (Pitts, 2008, p.2).

Today in America, municipal pools are not in great numbers as they were in the early 1900's and the remaining ones continue to close after years of underuse and neglected conditions often due to the loss of fiscal funding. "In the past 50 years or so, cities have drastically cut back on their recreation budgets. Urban and many small-town and rural school districts have slashed all programs, including physical education and swim programs have been eliminated" (Mohney, 2008, p.1). From my own personal experience, having coached at an outdoor 50M municipal pool which included a diving well in Durango Colorado, it still saddens me to this present day that it is now covered with asphalt and is used for the Durango High School parking lot. "Municipal pools are being closed down at an alarming rate and they're not being replaced by new pools. And so relatively poor people, especially people living in large inner cities, have much less access to swimming pools than Americans have at any time during the last, say, hundred years" (Wiltse, 2008, p.1).

Even though swimming pools are not free and as accessible as they had once been, it is imperative that swimming is taught, not only for a child's protection, but for building a strong foundation for future opportunities. If one child's life is saved each day we can change the world for that individual as well as for the benefit of the world. These lifesaving skills are essential to building lifelong champions- both in and out of the water. "The USA Swimming Foundation's Make a Splash initiative is a national child-focused water safety campaign, which aims to provide the opportunity for every child in America to learn to swim" (USA Swimming, 2010). This outreach to underserved populations will indeed provide much more opportunities for children to learn how to swim, ensuring a healthier generation than the one before.

## CHAPTER II

### DROWNING: THE SILENT KILLER

The worldwide attention to the drowning epidemic has been gaining momentum from the United Nations, World Health Organization, and swim governing bodies. Evidence suggests that the death toll from drowning is actually much higher than what is reported, as data collection does not paint a complete picture due to inconsistent anomalies. “The estimated death toll is all the more alarming because official data categorization methods for drowning exclude intentional drowning deaths (suicide or homicide) and drowning deaths caused by flood disasters and water transport incidents (including those where vessels carrying migrants, refugees and stateless people capsize during so-called irregular transport on water)” (WHO,2014, p.17). News headlines will continue to report on the loss of life concluding water is often the culprit, and unless education, along with action and equal opportunities to learn how to be safe around water, regardless of circumstance reaches the masses, drowning will continue to be a preventable plague, that is most felt in poor and underserved communities across the globe.

It will take a world-wide water safety agenda and immediate call to action that will bring real life-saving change. The power of the Olympic Brand can generate excitement and awareness to the cause of saving lives through swimming. The Summer Olympic Games generate big waves of swimming fanaticism and exposes the sport to a more expansive and captivated audience. It has been a consistent trend that during a summer that falls in an Olympiad, swimming programs across the United States will see a rise in participation and new faces will try out the sport. This popularity and exposure of the sport are good for the American swimming scene and competitive clubs in general, but lack the outreach the majority of minority children who are the most in need of such water safety intervention. Although many of those who view the aquatic disciplines cannot swim themselves, the Olympics creates a ripple effect that is felt throughout the swimming communities and can be used to enhance the prevention plan to reduce fatal drownings.

Yet even though Olympic swimming is widely viewed and enjoyed as a favorite pastime for Americans, dozens of people lose their lives every hour by this silent killer- drowning because they have never learned to swim. Swimming is a global activity that has impacted the

lives of countless generations around the world. Today, 208 countries are members of the International Swimming Federation (FINA) and more than 400,000 swimmers are registered with USA Swimming, however only 1% of those registered is African-American (USA Swimming, -Swimmers, 2016). The face of swimming must reflect a diverse population within its own organization in order to foster real inclusivity for generations to come.

Subsequently, “every hour of every day more than 40 people lose their lives to drowning. Whether it is small children slipping unnoticed into a pond, pool, or well; adolescents swimming under the influence of alcohol or drugs; passengers on vessels that capsize; or residents of coastal communities struck by floods, the daily toll of this leading global killer continues its quiet rise” (World Health Organization, 2014, p. iii). This quiet killer does not need to continue taking its toll on innocent lives and the world is taking notice. It will take a collective effort from education, public awareness campaigns, swimming ambassadors, and personal family commitments to pledge and prioritize water safety through swim instruction to prevent further fatalities in the water. The legacy of the swimming culture depends on a swift current of active participation from all. The time is now.

Drowning and water injuries which are responsible for the second leading cause of accidental deaths (Unintentional Drowning: get the Facts, n.d.), and in 86% of childhood fatal drowning occurs when the child is fully clothed (Infant Swimming Resource, 2015). Drowning is preventable and learn to swim programs reduce this risk especially when introduced in early childhood, 0 to 5 years. This is a critical time in human development “for establishing healthy behaviours and patterns that will carry over into later childhood, adolescence and adulthood” (Parenting Series, 2011, p.1). “Children who participate in early-years swimming appear to be achieving many milestones earlier than the normal population – across areas of physical, cognitive and language development – regardless of social background or gender” (Jorgensen, 2013, p.4). So not only does swimming promote a young child’s development and higher learning, knowing how to swim can save their life.

Children should be taught to swim early on in life and there is no reason another young life needs to perish due to lack of swimming skills. Drowning is preventable through education and prevention plans. Swimming confidence and familiarity in water can diminish or even be excluded from one’s horizons if not nurtured and cultivated through swim instruction, and water acclimation

from an early age. This is especially important in diverse populations that especially need the skill of swimming more than ever. It is never too early or late to learn how to swim.

Swimming was redefined as a sport in the early 1800's by the Europeans, but before this time, swimming was a life skill for survival. Swimming is a physical activity that takes place in the aquatic environment. This physical activity uses the actions of the whole being, body, mind and spirit, to move oneself safely forward through a body of water, regardless of one's own pursuit: whether survival, fitness, or pleasure. "Being able to master the water as a medium is essential to the human spirit, the physical being and life, one acquires discipline, coordination, balance and harmony", as stated by former Romanian Olympic swimmer, Adrian Ginju (Scutti, 2013, p.1).

Swimming should not be simply thought of and taught as an elite competitive sport. Rather the emphasis should be on swimming as a basic life skill. A swimmer as defined as a person who exhibits confidence demonstrating the six water competency skills as defined by the Red Cross. These skills are being able to entering water that is over one's head, and surfacing, floating and treading water for one minute, followed by turning around in the water and exiting, as well as, the ability to swim 25 yards to an exit and then exiting the water without assistance (Kids Safe Worldwide, 2016). The opposite of swimming is drowning, and for many that dichotomy is often the main debilitating factor against learning to swim. Because of the risks associated with the lack of swimming skills, many people are told to avoid going near watering holes altogether.

Avoidance of swimming as the only safe guard is not the solution to the drowning epidemic. Drownings can happen anywhere and at any time thus it is important to minimize the risk factors. The fear of drowning can permeate the mind set and debilitate the person's pursuit of formal swimming instruction. The idea that some non-swimmers do not separate drowning from the act of swimming of concern to the swimming community at large because the term drowning is often used to describe previous exposure to the sport. Keeping dry does not guarantee your safety from drowning. It is vital that swim instruction and water safety education be made available for our youth to give them life skills that go beyond survival.

Fear of drowning can act as a barrier to swim education instead of expediting the need for it. As a swim instructor, I have personally heard numerous students include drowning as a descriptive term regarding their time in the water. Just the term drowning is enough to scare someone out of the water for good and creates a negative legacy of the sport that does get passed on generationally. It is important to fully understand the meaning this verb has for the culture and future of the sport of swimming. In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a new definition for drowning- “Drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid” (Szpilman, Bierens, Handley, Orłowski, 2012, p.2). The drowning process can happen very quickly and is often fatal if a person does not receive assistance from the respiratory impairment. “It is estimated that more than 85% of cases of drowning can be prevented by supervision, swimming instruction, technology, regulation, and public education” (Szpilman et al, 2012, p.2). Since prevention is possible, it is critical that swim lessons and water safety skills be at the forefront of early childhood education programs to minimize the risks of drowning.

Unintentional drowning is a silent killer that claims the life of on average ten people every day in the United States. One in five people who lose their life from drowning are young children under 14. There are nonfatal water related injuries that occur at an even higher and alarming rate amongst this demographic. “For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries” (Unintentional Drowning: Get the Facts, n.d.) Children between the ages of 1 to 4 have the highest drowning rates, more than double the risk, and children 5-9 are second behind. Drowning constitutes 30% of unintentional injuries that lead to fatality among this young demographic. (Unintentional Drowning: Get the Facts, n.d.) Swimming pools are responsible for a large number of fatal drownings. “About 1,500 children drown each year in the United States. According to the CDC, African American males over the age of five are 1.3 times more likely to drown than are white males in the same age group” (Mohney,2008).

Drowning is not always immediate and can happen even after a person has left the water, so it is important to be perceptively aware of your child’s experience in the water. Secondary drowning, happens within one to twenty four hours after the incident of taking water into the



lungs. This can happen when a child struggles in the water, gets dunked under the water, or simply takes in water in the mouth. Secondary drowning happens when the airway opens up allowing water accumulation in the lungs. This inhalation of water causes non-cardiogenic pulmonary edema making it difficult to breathe, especially while lying down and requires immediate medical attention (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2014).

Adults can be victims of secondary drowning, but children are at greater risk due to their small stature and lung size. It is critical that patients who experience a near drowning seek medical attention and monitoring if displaying any of the symptoms after experiencing trouble in the water. These symptoms include coughing, wheezing, trouble breathing, chest pain, and exhaustion. Other atypical behavior may become present during secondary drowning such as extreme irritability and fatigue signally that the brain is being deprived of oxygen. (Gardner, n.d.). It is critical to the health and safety of a young child that he/she is well supervised at all times and parents are aware of all possible risks, as well as what to do should they need to act.

Even if you do not choose to visit a pool or other swimming establishment it is imperative to recognize that drowning can occur almost anywhere there is water. Parents or guardians must realize that all water sources pose a threat to the young child which makes the drowning hazard so prevalent and widespread. Drownings can happen silently as a child often does not have time to cry out for help. Unlikely places such as buckets of water, toilets, and even bathtubs are where most children under the age of 1 are at the most risk of drowning. (American Red Cross, 2016). Even just a shallow depth of water can pose as a danger as evident from data collected from the Minnesota Water Safety Coalition. Their research conducted from 2006 to 2010 “found there were 684 water submersions at home in bathtubs, buckets, toilets and landscaping features to children under the age of 5. This figure includes 434 fatalities (87 per year)” (MN Water Safety Coalition, n.d. p.1). Without adequate safe guards in place, the death toll with continue to claim the lives of innocent children.

The United States government’s response to the alarming number of accidental infant fatalities in plastic containers was to warn and inform the consumer about the potential hazards of the products directly on the product itself. “The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has developed guidelines, including education and labeling, to address the hazard of infants drowning

in five-gallon buckets” (MN Water Safety Coalition, n.d., p.1). Warning labels seem to be a minor step in the right direction but ultimately it is up to the supervision of the child that continues to be of most significance in drowning prevention. Home pools are also hazardous for accidental drownings, especially for American children aged 1-4 (American Red Cross, 2016). In the United States alone, there are tens of millions of residential pools and hot tubs, which ultimately contribute to the drowning epidemic (Aquatic Resource Network, 2009). All but two of the states in America have safety laws and requirements mandating safety guards in drains to prevent suction and entrapment, which has been linked to numerous childhood drowning accidents in home pools and spas (Aquatics Resource Network, 2009). It is necessary to know the potential risks and to take active and precautionary measures. Think of it as swimming together to stop this from becoming a devastating and cyclic epidemic.

There are many uncontrollable factors that impact drowning rates. For instance, one must take into account all factors, such as education, supervision, and environmental factors when analyzing the limited data on drowning. Simply knowing how to swim may not be enough in the prevention of drowning when natural disasters are the cause. People who live in flood prone low lying areas, can be at a higher risk of drowning deaths. As the climate changes and bigger storms create havoc with immense storm surges, or the ocean levels rise due to glacier melt, this too will have an unprecedented disastrous effect on the fatalities from drowning. The state of the environment contributes to the state of affairs that effect life and death.

The World Health Organization is working on foreign policy that will take proactive measures and include, “more integrated flood risk management; improved boating, shipping and ferry regulations; and development of national water safety policies” (World Health Organization, 2014, p.1). Progress and advancement in these areas has already been established in wealthy nations: however, most of these recommendations are not plausible nor feasible for low- and middle-income countries. These poorer populations are most at risk and in need of a strategic water safety plan more than ever. Without support from education, government or sporting bodies the lives lost will continue to have a tsunami affect. Humankind must work together as it will take a village to raise a swimmer.

Supervision and education are also needed in the strategic drowning prevention plan. “Some interventions, such as day care centres, provide benefits beyond drowning prevention” and stresses the importance of early childhood education. Swim education in schools should be a part of the equation (World Health Organization, 2014, p.1). “Physical education can be a vehicle for assisting students to develop skillfulness in and an awareness of physical activities and a resource for acquiring skills which they will be able to use throughout their lives” (Beale, Lynn, 2011). This idea is nothing new, yet much is still to be done in terms of outreach and closing the gap. As early as 1911, the National Women’s Lifesaving League began advocating the need for swimming and education in lifesaving for women and “to stimulate public opinion in favor of swimming as a branch of elementary education” (The International Swimming Hall of Fame, n.d., p.2)., Early childhood educational opportunities provide a safe and supervised environment for learning appropriate developmental milestones. Swimming should be a part of these milestones and can definitely be a complimentary practice to enhance a child’s lifelong skillset and development. Most notably, learning how to swim in schools has been linked to higher academic achievement. (Jorgensen, 2013) and can reduce adolescent drowning fatalities. (World Health Organization, 2014). Education is vital to the prevention platform and it is important to give all citizens the tools to assist because even those who cannot swim can save lives.

Safe rescue techniques can happen outside of the water, so not knowing how to swim does not negate the ability to help. For example, a non-swimmer can assist in a poolside rescue by laying down and extending a secured reaching assist to the drowning person. This life saving technique uses an object such as a pole, towel, or tree branch or by throwing a buoyant object to the drowning person. These quick and safe responses are often neglected because they were never taught. This inaction is often always fatal so proper instruction is critical and should proactively be taught as part of a water safety education prevention plan. Education passes on the knowledge and skills required to stay safe themselves and to save others. “The rescuers must not put themselves at risk, awareness of safe rescue techniques should be a focus of community-based awareness raising, and part of learn-to-swim programmes” (WHO, 2014, p.26).

Also assessing and addressing risk areas like exposed bodies of water such as swimming pools and building child proof fencing or in the case of open water properly using a lifejacket or

personal flotation device is proactive in reducing accidental drownings. (CDC, 2012). If you are swimming where there is no lifeguard you are swimming at your own risk. Parents must decrease the risk for their child around water even if a lifeguard is present, by ultimately keeping a close eye on their child at all times. But even with all of these strategies in place, supervision still is of the most extreme importance in drowning prevention layers of protection. Other water safe mantras should include such preventative measures such as never swimming alone. Supervision and response time is essential to rescue survival rates so the buddy system in swimming is an unspoken code that needs to be reechoed loud and clear and in all languages worldwide.

Support from swimming's stakeholders, such as, Governmental Organizations (GO's) as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), such as the United Nations (UN), World Health Organizations (WHO), International Olympic Committee (IOC) and National Olympic Committees (NOC), The International Swimming Federation (FINA) and other publically funded programs should be standing up together to stop this global killer. It has only been in this century that there has ever been a worldwide report on drowning. It was published by the World Health Organization in 2014. This Global Report on drowning states their current research on drowning statistics around the world along with prevention guidelines. This report stresses the importance of having a global strategic prevention plan to decrease drowning (World Health Organization). It is through collaborative efforts, worldwide awareness, and swim educational programs that we will be able to target this preventable public health crisis, "to reduce what is an intolerable death toll, particularly among children and adolescents" (World Health Organization, 2014).

### *Drowning Fears*

A child's brain is undergoing many synapses, or connections from birth. These early experiences and connections to the world around them help imprint their thinking. "These connections become a basis for how the child thinks" (Jeppson, Myers-Walls, Love, 2013). The more new experiences a child can encounter early on in life, the more prepared they are later in life. Swimming is no exception. A child must have opportunities to explore water safely and create body/mind connections with water. These synapses can change the way they feel about the aquatic environment. "Research shows that children who learn water safety skills also reap benefits in overall cognitive, physical and emotional development...and it may also save their lives" (USA Swimming, 2010).

One of the biggest challenges in learning to swim is overcoming subconscious fears which often stem from early age traumas related to water. "It becomes a barrier, it becomes an anchor for them not to learn how to swim and stay far away from the pool" says Professor Jensen regarding fear (Jensen, 2009, p.1). Without this life saving skill, phobias and anxieties around water can be manifested and cultivated for life. Aqua phobia is an abnormal and persistent fear of water. This fear is real and debilitating. It is unfortunately often passed on from generation to generation and can create a culture of aquaphobes. People who suffer from aqua phobia most likely have had a previous bad experience with water. "It may have been they almost drowned, someone they know drowned, they were pushed into the water or in a boat that over turned or the fear may have developed based on parental attitudes. Somewhere in their past, a scary experience with water has made them afraid" (Bailey, 2016). By having children participate in learn-to-swim activities and creating a safe learning environment in the water, the child can create a positive swimming experience that can last a lifetime.

If a child never comes into contact with water, that child will never gain the tools to feel safe. If the parent or guardian does not swim chances are that a swimming skillset does not get passed down to the next generation. "Research also shows that the children of adults who don't know how to swim are at a greater risk of not learning to swim, which increases their risk of drowning" (Swimming Saves Lives Foundation, 2016). Having no familiarity could mean the difference between sink or swim. "Lack of relevant knowledge and the necessary information and

facts on a subject, will always breed in; the unknown, uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and phobia to manifest itself into us" (Gul, n.d., p.15). In order to treat people who suffer from this anxiety caused by water, it is vital to educate the populous and provide swim education in a caring and trained manner

Breaking waves into unfamiliar territory takes courage and practice. Non-swimming parents who take the plunge past their own fears so that their child can become a swimmer is vital to breaking the cycle of non-swimmers. USA Swimming concluded that, "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 a swimmer" (USA Swimming, 2010, p.13). To protect the child, a parent needs to give swim instruction early on, not just avoid the water altogether, which happens again and again, reaffirming the status quo. Good thing Missy Franklin's mom broke the mold and advocated for her daughter to learn to swim because she never could. Franklin says she started swimming at age five primarily because, "my mom was afraid of water, so she wanted me to learn early" (USA Swimming, 2010, p.1). Missy Franklin has gone on to be an Olympic medallist and an outspoken advocate for swim instruction.

Participation in learn to swim education programs that are a part of a multi-layered initiative employs safe and appropriate teaching strategies that make overcoming aqua phobia possible. Take the case of Gold medalist Olympian Cullen Jones. Jones, an African-American, had a near drowning incident at a water park when he was just a small child and has since been outspoken for the cause. This traumatic event could have easily become a barrier that could have kept him from ever engaging in the sport of swimming, or any other water sports for that matter. Thankfully, this was not the case and swimming instruction reshaped Jones' path in life. He has recognized the need to change cultural attitudes and "to bridge the gap especially in black communities" (USA Swimming, 2010). He goes on to share, "My Mom was terrified of water, but she knew that I could die if I didn't know how to swim, so she went against the grain to make that happen" (USA Swimming, 2010).

Thankfully, Cullen got swimming instruction soon after because learning to swim has had a huge impact on his life and on the sport of swimming, as well as the lives of millions of American children. Cullen Jones continues to give back to the sport which saved his life by his

outspoken commitment to the Make a Splash Foundation. This learn to swim initiative was founded in 2004 by the USA Swimming Foundation. It is a philanthropic outreach organization aimed at providing swimming skills to all children across America. This foundation empowers young people by giving them the chance to swim and be a champions of their lives. (USA Swimming, 2010).

So it seems only natural that Cullen Jones is a swimming ambassador not only for USA Swimming but for the world as well by shattering the misconceptions that black people do not swim. Jones, along with the Make a Splash network and its team of swim ambassadors, has given swim instruction to over 200 million young swimmers across the United States. (USA Swimming, 2010). “Jones has helped to break a long-standing stereotype that African-Americans are physically unsuited for swimming. This is important for a number of reasons, one of which is the encouragement and interest in the sport that will result in others, especially African Americans, learning to swim” (Mohney, 2008).

It is important to recognize and break the pattern of non-swimmers simply because of inherited aqua phobia. Various methodologies can be successful in overcoming fear of the water but consistency and education is paramount. Practice makes for a better and more confident swimmer, so “there should be no rushing through the learning process because acquired swim skills will not be permanent unless learned over time” (Burgess, n.d., p.1). Children need quality and accessible swim educational opportunities at an early age. Swim lessons can offer many teachable moments regarding water safety and swim instruction. One obvious method is engaging in the practice and development of swimming is through the direct learning experience, which engages the pupil in the kinaesthetic act of swimming. Through supervised swim lessons, set within a safe environment, the child can begin to practice water acclimation and safety skills. The child must be willing to participate in the water for this stage of learning to be effective.

A child is like a sponge and they are constantly absorbing information that will influence behaviours and shape their experiences. If a child refuses to get into the water that can be a hurdle when learning how to swim, but that does not mean a child will not learn. Simply knowing that no water immersion is imminent can reduce the child’s anxiety and allow the instruction to begin. The non-swimmer can gain confidence by watching instruction before applying any aquatic

kinaesthetic into motion. Having younger swimmers observe the teacher demonstrate the skill can prepare the student for the act of swimming without fear of the unknown.

Various methodologies must be used in tailoring to the unique needs of every learner, specifically those who are uncomfortable in the aquatic environment. Auditory modality is an effective tool in teaching swimming to a non-swimmer. This simply means talking, reading or listening to the facts of buoyancy and swimming to reduce the unknown anxieties and create structure for the child. This can happen on dry land as well as in the water. Instructions that prepare a child for learning acquisition of new skills is beneficial and should be repetitive and simple to follow. A declarative statement such as '1, 2, 3, eyes on me', is an approach which is helpful when giving oral instruction, as its sequential order helps grab the attention of the young child. Children who participate in swimming lessons get used to following step by step instructions which can roll over to other areas of learning. Children who are early learner swimmers "scored better on measures of understanding and complying with directions" (Early Learning Swimmers, 2013, p.3). It will take a combination of these approaches to give quality swim instruction that fit the unique need of the swimmer. Utilizing these various teaching methodologies will be beneficial towards saving lives, all the while creating positive learning experiences and lasting skills in the water.

Learning to swim is paramount when on an island community. The Diversity Aquatic Program visited St. Croix on Water Safety Day, May 15, 2014 and was able to begin the conversation of water safety with 5000 students across 15 different schools on St. Croix (Jingle, 2014). However, in the past years St. Croix has lost several lives in the waters of our island home. In just one week in 2015, three lives were lost on St. Croix due to drowning. The open waters of the Caribbean Sea that surround the island of St. Croix continue to claim lives and three men drowned just days apart on St. Croix in 2015. A teenage student, a middle aged doctor and an elder senior man will be never see another tomorrow. It is a travesty to lose any member of the community but is an injustice to the lives lost because all of these deaths could have been prevented. There is a disparity and it will take more public awareness, immediate action and water safety education initiatives to stop the next victim to our waters. Habits and lifestyle choices start early on in human development and it is crucial that swimming education and CPR be inclusively taught throughout the community to prevent such senseless loss.



At the end of last year, in September of 2015, a four year old toddler boy drowned in the waters off a public beach in St. Croix, U.S.V.I. This accidental drowning occurred “on Rainbow Beach in Frederiksted on Monday afternoon after being left unattended by his mother, who was attending to the needs of the toddler’s younger sibling, VIPD Public Information Officer Kevin Jackson announced this afternoon” (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015, p.1). It had also been reported that it was actually an employee at the neighboring beach bar and restaurant that saw the young child floating on the water and it was he who pulled the child out and began administering CPR until professional help arrived at the scene, sadly, too late. (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). Parents and other adults need to be diligent in the care and attention given to their children as well as for other children around the water. A young child can become a victim all too easily. Their safety is dependent on proper parental or guardian supervision. Even the eyes of a stranger can recognize the call for action and can help, but only if they have learned the skills and are both confident and diligent to act. Our children deserve the unwavering attention of properly prepared responders especially around bodies of water.

### *The Law of Buoyancy*

Swimming brings humankind back into the aquatic environment and is far more than just an experience of the senses. Swimming is an activity that requires physical skill, mental courage, and of course safe water to swim in. Swimming teaches people about the mechanics of their balance, propulsion, and buoyancy in water which allows us to trust safely in our natural ability to float, not sink. The physical law of buoyancy was discovered by an Ancient Greek mathematician and inventor named Archimedes, “stating that anybody completely or partially submerged in a fluid (gas or liquid) at rest is acted upon by an upward, or buoyant, force the magnitude of which is equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the body” (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016, p.1) A swimmer’s buoyancy refers to the ability to float in water. It is felt as an upward force of water against the body. Buoyancy determines if you sink or float, or even remain neutrally balanced in the water.

Males typically are denser in body muscle mass, which may explain why they are twice as likely to drown as women (WHO, 2014). This creates a negative buoyancy, as seen when the lower half of the body sinks because of this density. On the other hand, females have a positive buoyancy

and tend to float more easily due to their composition. Some individuals even have what is called neutral buoyancy. This simply means that there is an equal balance of body's density and the density of the water. One such rarity of aquatic perfection is seen in the open water swimmer, Lynn Cox. Cox has a biological advantage of neutral buoyancy in the water that many simply do not possess. Cox's uniquely suspended state has allowed her to pioneer some of the most extreme conditions in the world of open water swimming. Lynne Cox was the first woman to swim the five miles of 40 degree ocean from Alaska to Russia and in 2003, she became the first woman to swim one mile in the Antarctic Ocean wearing only a swimsuit, cap, and goggles.

Regardless of your buoyancy position, everyone can be taught to swim because learn-to-swim programs teach body balance, as well as breathing, proper breath control and technical stroke mechanics that can greatly improve anyone's mobility and safety in the water. Whether positive, negative or neutral in buoyancy, teaching swimmers from a young age cultivates and fosters this feeling of being an aquatic being, and trusting in the Law of Buoyancy gives scientific proof that we all can float but that we must trust the water and not fight against it. "A segregationist inspired study from the 1960s that claimed to show that Blacks were biologically less buoyant than Whites because of higher density in their bones and body mass has long since been debunked"(Pitts, 2008, p.3) yet many still hold true this belief and do not trust the science.

Water can be our friend or foe. According to Russian Olympic swimmer, Alexandr Popv, "the water is your friend.....you don't have to fight with water, just share the same spirit as the water, and it will help you move" (Swimming Quotes, n.d., p.1). To ensure that this life preserving natural resource of water is more a friend than foe, we need to educate ourselves and the citizens of the world on how to survive potential water related injuries and even drowning deaths. Aquatic skills need to be practiced under safe conditions, with trained swim instructors, because swimming is a life skill that can be taught and is a matter of public safety. Swimming education can lead to the development of fit and skillful athletic competitors, but it can also reconnect us to the conservation of a healthy and connected planet. For without water, there can be no swimmer. We live in a world where water equals life. The ocean, rivers, and lakes connect us. Water transports our people and products. Water provides life sustaining nourishment without which death is imminent. The benefits of learning to swim can be applicable to all people, yet drowning continues

to claim lives every minute of every day especially in vulnerable areas and the world powers are taking notice.

### CHAPTER III

#### SWIMMING: DIVERSITY IN AQUATICS

A cry for help has been heard as drowning prevention must not be silent any longer. Global superpowers are acknowledging that drowning is a major health issue and have established safety campaigns because drowning risks can be prevented. Cultural and financial roadblocks have hindered the progress of drownings decline, as it continues to claim lives every day. Culture indeed feeds into the growing problem of drownings. If parents do not come from a swimming family most likely they do not swim and in turn, the next generation will also stay on dry land cultivation a fear of this unexplored territory- water. There needs to be public awareness and the resolve to reshape the swim culture and bring swimming back to life for all. Through community outreach education programs the message of being safe in the water is beginning to expand and diversify.

United States Swimming has recognized the lack of diversity in their sport and has begun to reshape the future of swimming by committing to expand their learn-to-swim platforms into high need communities. “USA Swimming is committed to a culture of inclusion and opportunity for people of diverse backgrounds, including, but not limited to, race, age, income, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender expression and sexual orientation” (USA Swimming, 2010, p.1). Learn-to-swim education can happen both in and out of the water. Creating a safe environment where fears and misconceptions can be taken away to make room for the actualization that swimming is for everyone and can be to enjoyed safely. It is important that all members of a community have access to water safety and prevention tactics, regardless of the economics of the neighborhood.

#### *The Color of Swimming*

“The African American experience of exclusion from the opportunity to swim in Fort Lauderdale was commonplace throughout America in the first half of the twentieth century, leading to what has been described as a cultural disconnect between the Black community and swimming” (Pitts, 2008). This has created a racial disparity in swimming with real tragic consequences – loss of

life- specifically black lives. The Center for Disease Control reporting African-Americans are drowning at a nearly three times the rate of Whites and these studies continue to indicate that men are more likely to be a victim of drowning by as much as 80% (CDC, n.d.). It is a fact that African Americans have a higher drowning rate than whites.

In the United States there is a cultural misconception that African-Americans do not swim. Unfortunately a racially divided history, and even present state of racial tensions, that has kept swimming white. “Swimming is very white. Only 1 percent of the athletes who reported to a 2014 survey from USA Swimming identified as black” (Neal, 2016, p1). Some scholars and researchers alike blame this school of thought on the generational attitudes stemming from segregation at many public pools during the time of integration. “A recent study commissioned by the USA Swimming Foundation and conducted by the University of Memphis found that nearly 70% of African American children and nearly 60% of Hispanic children have low or no swim ability, compared to 40% of Caucasians, putting them at risk for drowning” (Research Corner, 2010, p.1). The statistics are real but can be reversed, as drowning is preventable.

An honest dialogue in the state of cultural affairs can be reflected in the waters of USA Swimming, and as such, the sport of swimming can be a vehicle for real life saving change. Signs of diversity and inclusion have been rippling in the waters ever since Simone Manuel won gold in the Rio Olympics and her story will indeed inspire many in her wake. But it will take much more than Manuel’s efforts alone, to close the disparity in race and socio-economics in USA Swimming, but the ripple effect is real and the tsunami of inclusiveness and diversity is happening. Real people, myself included, are on the forefront of making sure everyone has the right to swim. It will require both the implementation of compulsory swim education programs introduced at an early age along with an honest conversation about the racism that faces America even today and continues to plague the sport of swimming. This social inequality in the waters needs to be eradicated to prevent drowning across all borders and to once and for all close the swimming gap and create a safe environment for all. More opportunities to add diversity in aquatics starts with partnerships will begin locally within the community and change will come when we swim together. Opening up the accessibility to help those children who need it the most will create an inclusive aquatic environment.

Thankfully, swimming knowledge and participation has begun expanding thanks to learn to swim initiatives and collaborations in both public and private sectors. Having Olympic swim ambassadors is just yet another way to open the swim market and develop the love of the sport across all demographics. In the same wake of Cullen Jones, who is known for his personal commitment to swim education within minority populations, another such swimmer exemplifies the rebranding of the image often associated within the swimming community is Maritza Correia. “Nicknamed Ritz, Maritza Correia qualified for the USA Olympic Team in 2004, becoming the first Puerto Rican of African descent to be on the USA Olympic Swimming Team,” (USA Swimming, 2010, p.1). Correia had been diagnosed with a severe case of scoliosis as a child. In 1988 she began swimming as a part of a treatment plan for her scoliosis, which is still often prescribed regularly for numerous other ailments. Correia’s swimming not only helped her alleviate pain, but has led to many victories in and out of the pool, including being the first African-American swimmer to win a silver medal in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece ((USA Swimming, 2010).

“Since 2013, Correia has been the spokeswoman for the Swim 1922 partnership between USA Swimming and traditionally black sorority Sigma Gamma Rho of which Correia is also a member. Through Swim 1922, Correia works with both organizations to increase swim participation in the black community” (USA Swimming, 2010), because in order to change the culture one must first take the plunge. History is still being made, and big waves of change are occurring within the swimming community. “In March 2015 when three black women — Simone Manuel, Lia Neal (both from Stanford University) and Natalie Hinds (University of Florida) made history by finishing in the top three in the 100 freestyle at the NCAA Swimming Championships” (Neal, 2016, p.1). Manuel and Neal have again made history when for the first time two black swimmers make it onto the 2016 American Olympic Team. Simone Manuel continues to reshape the history for the sport of swimming when she became the first African-American to win an Olympic gold medal in an individual swimming event, the 100 M Free, and will take home another silver medal at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.

There are many theories as to why there is a cultural stereotype that African Americans do not swim, after having been known to have been strong in aquatic skills for centuries. America’s racist past has definitely negatively impacted the culture of swimming because that is

when the lack of accessibility to swimming became a reality for the African-American population. After talking to many former African American student swimmers, as well as their parents that I have coached swimming over the last decade, I have gained insight into why swimming is not a top priority, and have heard a gamut of reasons ranging from hair care concerns to a lack of familiarization with the sport. “Black women have had a long, contentious relationship with swimming pools. As children, many of us learned that chlorine doesn't mix with processed hair” (Glanton, 2016, p.1), which is a sentiment echoed by many young ladies. The ideal of beauty has pressured many African-American girls to opt for a hair style that is not in its natural state, which is one reason some site for their non-participation.

The fact that the cultural know-how of swimming has not been passed on from previous generations, has systemically aided in the disparity of the safe waters. Grandparents raised in the era of segregation have held tight to the hurtful memories and fear associated with the swimming cultural attitudes at this time. In turn, many did not see swimming as a sport for themselves or their family and stayed at the water's edge. Thankfully not all believe this way, and these misconceptions are being purged from African-American and other minority mindsets, and with the success from athletes like Jones, Correia, Manuel and Neal, the sport is making a big splash in aquatics. It is important to continue the dialogue and change these stereotypes and misconceptions on minorities and swimming because they are false and are encouraging nonparticipation among these groups, putting them at an unnecessarily greater risk.

It is great to see this wide-held false mindset changing and expanding to encourage inclusivity in the sport of swimming. With the support of newly formed organizations, such as the Diversity in Aquatics Program (DAP) the cultural misconception in aquatics is being washed away. The need for cultural diversity in swimming has been recognized, and in 2008, Diversity in Aquatics Inc. was born. DAP's unique approach to their mission of promoting a diverse swimming family is using the swimming networks and web forums to connect everyone and raise the voice on this issue. Utilizing images posted on their website that celebrate and showcase the cultural richness that can be found in the swimming communities across the world, is the first of its kind. “Our website and the images submitted by members show us in different aquatic environments to address those stereotypes. Nowhere else do you see a website showcasing and breaking down the stereotypes like issues with hair and that we are not afraid of the water. In

those images you see all types of beautiful faces and aquatic sports being enjoyed by all” (Jingles, 2014, p.1).

Diversity in Aquatics Program, DAP is a non-profit that has a clear mission in addressing and changing the current swim culture and making it a more inclusive one. “The sole mission of decreasing the rate of drowning worldwide by helping to create, promote and support diversity and inclusion programs in the United States and abroad” (Marable, 2015, p.1). DAP has created a comprehensive network of swimming leaders, educators, and communities which provide for the opportunity to connect those working together in the world of aquatics to reach a common goal through integration and swim education. “DAP is the only organization in the world that has provided learn to swim and aquatics services on every inhabited continent and is the only non-profit to have the support of three major national governing bodies; USA Swimming, USA Triathlon and US Rowing” (Marable, 2015, p.1). Although it is a relatively small and young organization, DAP is bridging the gap between swimming and minorities across the globe and reshaping the cultural identity of swimming’s present day and future promise for a safer tomorrow. The aquatic adventure can flourish with diversity and goodwill as long as swim education is cross cultural and accessible in all communities.

It is important for young children to have role models in sports and in life, whom they can see themselves in. The 2016 Rio Games have definitely shone a light on this often taboo and overlooked disparity in the waters. This will ultimately create a positive effect on young African-American swimmers because when a child can see a familiar reflection in the pool then the child can relate to being a member of the swimming community, thus progress can be made. Even celebrities are jumping in the deep end to be the voice in educating swim education with the hopes of curbing drowning in minority communities. Unlikely swim ambassador, Chris Bridges, a.k.a. Ludacris, is a successful African-American rapper who is bringing his musical star power to aid the swimming platform for minority children. He is working in partnership with the USA Swimming Foundation’s Make a Splash program alongside Cullen Jones. Bridges’ mother, Roberta Shields, made sure that he was taught to swim because that is what she grew up with. Shields reflects, “Swimming is generational. I’m blessed because my grandfather swam. His grandfather swam. It wasn’t a matter of if you’re learning to swim, but when” (Ludacris, Hilson, Michael, 2016, p.16).

The United States Virgin Islands, a chain of islands in the Caribbean Sea, employs proactive efforts towards water safety within its own diverse population. The programs are subsidized by private organizations and some public funds from the Department of Education. This collaboration is vital as more than half of the population lives under the poverty level. Being surrounded by open water, being water safe is a daily concern, especially when drowning claims the lives of several Virgin Islanders each year, contributing to the growing statistics. (Help Every Child Become a Swimmer, 2015). One public awareness campaign is International Water Safety Day, where the objective is clearly stated in their mission, “striving to make a planet that is 70% water, 100% water safe” (International Water Safety Day, 2015). This day is promoted by many organizations like local swim clubs, schools and communities worldwide to combat the pandemic of drowning. May 15, 2016 was the most recent water safety day which aims to bring awareness to the importance of water safety through learn-to-swim initiatives all around the world. This event happens every summer around the world to address the drowning epidemic and promotes learning how to swim. A lifelong affinity for water as well as introducing the child to a wide world of aquatic activity is possible through education for all. Swimming has no boundaries or borders- it is time for all of us to swim, without exclusions.

### *Paralympic Swimming*

Swimming does not discriminate. It is a tool for self- re-discovery. Swimming in water is as much about survival and physical human development as it is for emotional strength and life skills for every human being to enhance our human experience. Water reconnects human nature and development and allows the impossible to become possible. One of the greatest things about swimming is “that all children of any ability or background can take part - and it is more accessible to children with disabilities than most other sports” (The ASA Swimming Census, 2012, p.10). This statement is true today for all people who swim regardless of age or ability.

Swim instruction can be adapted to fit the needs of each unique individual. “Swimmers with a disability require the same opportunities as their peers to become familiar with the water environment and to progress with swimming skills” (Inclusion of Swimmers with Disability, n.d., p.7). Swimming’s bio mechanics and therapeutic inclusiveness lends itself to the development of strong and focused individuals, who are reliant not only on themselves but on the water which



holds them up. It is time to raise up our future through learn to swim opportunities for all and build stronger communities who share in aquatic readiness for a greater existence.

Swimming has always been an Olympic Sport, ever since the revitalization of the Modern Olympic Games. Swimming is also at the forefront of the Paralympic Games since its debut in Rome, Italy in 1960 (US Paralympics, 2016). The Paralympic movement is founded on an original idea and universal vision of Dr. Guttmann, founder of the Stoke Mandeville Games. It has grown from a small archery event for patients with spinal cord injuries to a mega-event parallel to the Olympic Games. “The word “Paralympic” derives from the Greek preposition “para” (beside or alongside) and the word ‘Olympic’. Its meaning is that Paralympics are the parallel Games to the Olympics and illustrates how the two movements exist side-by-side” (International Paralympic Committee, n.d. Paralympics history of the movement, n.d., p.1). The Paralympic Games has created world-wide social change which is taking root across the globe and making inclusion in sports a reality for all. Swimming is a sport that so many people can benefit from simply because the aquatic environment is so inviting and reassuring. The buoyancy of the water allows the swimmer to be supported without restriction or cumbersome limitation.

The Paralympics celebrate the achievements of the human spirit and it’s potential. Its proximity to the Olympic Games has given inspiration to millions of future athletes, both able-bodied and not. Witnessing Paralympic swimming is definitely a great example of the power of human inspiration in action. One such inspirational swimmer is U.S. Paralympian Joe Wise. Wise was diagnosed at age nine with Mitochondrial Myopathy, which is a muscular disorder that can be life threatening. It is considered “a multifaceted disease which, in Joe's case, is life-threatening. It is a severe muscular disorder that affects his legs, hips, abdominals and lungs. Normal tasks that most people don't give a second thought to, like breathing, are a matter of life and death for Joe” (Owens, 2012, p.1). Joe Wise is beating the odds, and is swimming his way into a fuller life. Swimming seems to be slowing down the disease and Wise gives credit to the sport for his success and optimism. (Owens, 2012). Wise says, “He firmly believes that swimming has been, and continues to be, his lifeline” (Owens, 2012, p.1). Swimming indeed has therapeutic benefits that provide extraordinary results for many people and is recommended by many physicians as treatment.

Other Paralympic swimmers have echoed this sentiment and shown great feats of athleticism despite their own physical challenges. “Paralympic swimming competition is open to male and female athletes with physical disabilities such as dwarfism, amputation/limb loss, blindness/visual impairment, spinal cord injury/wheelchair-users, cerebral palsy/brain injury/stroke, cognitive impairment and Les autres” (US Paralympics, 2016). These athletes have a new found freedom in the water. This freedom of movement allows them to experience through swimming a happier, healthier life.

“Water is one of the big equalizers. One of the phrases I heard since I got involved in this is that we are all equal in the water and that is really true. Athletes with disabilities, from below-knee amputations to severe quads, can compete and compete successfully” (Disabled Sports USA, n.d., p.1), states Queenie Nichols, who has been a long-time U.S. Paralympic swim coach. Nichols recommends children with special needs should begin swim instruction at an early age to see benefits such as “socialization opportunities, greater independence in activities of daily living, and improved ability to cope with limitations imposed by disabilities” (Disabled Sports USA, n.d., p.1). In fact social media has risen with such fever that even the IPC has taken notice and launched a Facebook account for IPC Swimming. Swimming needs to be a familiar activity for all people. Swim instruction needs to be available for every child, regardless of physical ability, in order to provide a positive experience in the aquatic environment and to ensure the safety and well-being of future generations.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **SWIMMING: EDUCATION**

Public education is paramount when it comes to water safety and smart safe practices in and around the water. Without such skills, friends and bystanders become as helpless as the victims themselves. It is critical that communities recognize this risk and take preventative precautions around the water, this will only be done through education and a cultural change in thinking about swimming. Historically speaking, schools in America have always had physical education in their curriculum mainly because of the strong influence of three early influencers-England, Germany, and Sweden. The English brought with them sports and games that emphasized the development of one's own moral code, similar to that emulated by Pierre de Coubertin, founding father of the Modern Olympic Games. The Germans introduced the Turner Societies to American schools in 1848, which taught that physicality and fitness were achieved through rigorous gymnastics trainings because they believe in "A sound mind in a sound body" (American Turners, 2016, p.1). The Swedish influence was seen in the promotion of health through light routine movement. (Mitchell, 2012).

The importance of sports in education can be traced back even further to Ancient Greece. This diverse influence helped shape the physical education in America. Values of sport and exercise are an integral core part of the development of a child and has been shaping educational systems since the earliest of civilization. It is with reverence of the Ancient Olympic Games that sports education and the power of sport has been established throughout the ages. The Modern Olympic Games are rooted in the past and place value in the belief that the moral character of an individual can blossom through the practice of sport. And although swimming was not part of the Ancient Olympic Games it is currently one of the most anticipated sports of the Summer Olympic Program, yet it is not compulsory in the American schooling system and most schools have seen the loss of value in the physical education curriculum altogether.

America's current physical education program has since practically dissolved in the majority of public schools and lack of funding is to blame. Less time is devoted to sports in schools, and even recess has been shortened or eliminated. This compromises our children's future health. Even though America is a rich sporting nation with a long history of sport education and policies such as the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, CIGEPS, there is room for improvement. Currently, we are failing to adequately prepare our students for lifelong fitness within the school environment.

CIGEPE was established over thirty years ago in 1978 as an International tool designed “to promote the role and value of sport and its inclusion in public policy” (UNESCO.org, 2015, p.1). It is run by 18 members of the United Nations, (UN) which speaks volumes to the significance of sports has in politics, especially noting that the International Olympic Committee has more National Olympic Committees (NOC) in sports, than the number of nations as recognized by the UN. All International Federations abide by the governing body of each sport, and swimming is governed by the International Swimming Federation (FINA). “The cooperation between FINA and CIGEPE-UNESCO opens up new possibilities in the attainment and awareness of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially the 4th MDG which aims to “Reduce child mortality by two thirds, considering swimming as a tool to protect people’s lives from the dangers of drowning” (FINA appointed member of the Permanent Consultative Council (PCC) of CIGEPE, 2015).

With this said, action must be taken against drowning, not just talked about at a roundtable. “The IOC’s strategic roadmap for the future of the Olympic Movement, the IOC will continue to strengthen its partnership with UNESCO to achieve its shared vision that sport is a fundamental human right and that physical education should be available to all individuals ” (Education through sport, 2015, p.1). Even though global attention is acknowledging the growing dangers of drowning, swimming is still perceived as an exclusive, expensive and highly competitive sport that takes place outside of our public institutions.

The disconnect from having once regarded swimming as a life skill, not simply a competitive sport, continues to keep many people out of the water altogether. Most of the learn-to-swim educational options in America are privately run businesses which can deter a vast amount of families from enrolling simply because of the cost. Findings suggest “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” (Research Corner, 2010, p.1). Research from Kids Safe Worldwide has shown that nine out of ten parents recognize swim lessons are as essential as safety belts in vehicles, however over half report that they have not enrolled their child in formal swimming lessons (Kids Safe Worldwide, 2016).

There are many successful learn-to-swim programs designed to teach aquatic safety skills and proper swimming skills. These programs are as diverse in methodologies as the American landscape, yet many simply do not participate because of the country club mentality and costs associated with these learn-to-swim programs. As found in the research done by USA Swimming, money continues to be the number one significant contributor to this deadly epidemic. The lack of free or low cost public swimming establishments has made swimming an expensive and exclusive sport for many in America, and those who do not have extra income to spend on the rising cost of sports participation in America, miss out and children's lives are put at risk. Without swim instruction and practice, lower socioeconomic families are at a greater risk around water. "The lack of diversity in the sport has little to do with skill, passion or commitment, but access to both personal and institutional resources" (Neal, 2016, p.2), thus it is critical to provide programs that are accessible.

The cost of losing a loved one to drowning has an infinitely disastrous impact on the lives of so many. Drownings affect society whether directly or indirectly and it is time to make a change of course in drowning prevention. Swimming statistics in the United States show that the poorer socio- ethnic populations have little to no swimming skills. "70% of African American children, 60% of Latino children, and 40% of Caucasian children have low or no swimming ability" (USA Swimming, 2010). In the United States during the period between 2005 and 2009, "the fatal unintentional rate for African Americans was significantly higher than that of whites across all ages. The disparity is widest among children 5-14 years old. The fatal drowning rate of African American children ages 5 to 14 is almost three times that of white children in the same age range" (Unintentional Drowning: Get the Facts, n.d.).

### *Privatized Swim Education*

The schools of thought and associated costs may differ from program to program, but safety is still the name of the game. Learning to swim encourages children to grow into aquatically active participants for a lifetime. One of the oldest and most recognizable organizations that have pioneered aquatic safety standards is the Red Cross. "The Red Cross, over 100 years in action, is a well-known service organization that provides swim lessons to millions each year as part of their mission in water safety for all. The American Red Cross created the first national water safety

program in the U.S. – and today it’s still the gold standard for aquatics training” (Red Cross, 2016). The Red Cross has a strategic plan for their next 100 years of service as seen in The Centennial Campaign. This campaign is aimed at areas and populations that have a high rate of fatal and non-fatal drownings. Those most at risk for drowning will be selected sites for the Red Cross Swim Lessons. The Centennial Campaign commences its second summer, a time where eight out of ten Americans will be engaging in aquatic activities. Many of these beachgoers, boaters, fishermen, pool and water park visitors have a skewed perception of their own swimming abilities. This is a fact that the Red Cross researched through a nationwide survey which concluded “that while 80 percent of Americans said they could swim, only 56 percent of the self-described swimmers can perform all five of the basic skills that might help to save their life in the water” (Red Cross, 2014, p.1).

An even older NGO dedicated to promoting water safety is the YMCA of the USA. The YMCA has three area of focus: “for youth development, for healthy living, and for social responsibility” (YMCA.net, 2016). It is an organization that is over 160 years in service providing swimming lessons and water safety instruction. The YMCA strives at building better communities across the United States through accountability and focus to bring about meaningful change (YMCA.net, 2016). This organization is affiliated with religious philosophies so ultimately will not reach as diverse a population that is warranted in the fight against drowning worldwide. It is making small waves of change within its own community but swimming needs to be viewed on a broader horizon to save more lives.

*SwimAmerica*, is yet another national learn-to-swim provider which has helped to shape the future of young swimmers in a niche market of competitive swimming. It was founded in 1988 and run by the American Swim Coaches Association, ASCA, and is serving over 900 sites across the country (*SwimAmerica*, 2016). From my time as a *SwimAmerica* site supervisor and coach, I can say that the program does fulfill its mission statement. Part of ASCA’s mission is to “provide leadership to American and World swimming at all levels” (American Swim Coach Association, 2016, p.1) and *SwimAmerica* is generally marketed as a feeder-program for competitive swim teams across the United States, as well as a few International locations. They believe, “it’s the state of the art learn-to-swim program in the world today brought to you by the same coaches who have brought you the most successful sport team on the planet the USA Olympic Swimming Team”

(*SwimAmerica*, 2016, p.1). The focus of safety is built into the development of skills taught and is followed by an emphasis on technical skills for competitive swimming development.

Their platform emphasizes that as soon as a child has independent motion they are at risk for drowning therefore it is critical to begin swim lessons from as early as 6 months of age. *SwimAmerica* is. Their state of the art motto is, “We learn from and teach the elite athlete AND the new child!” (*SwimAmerica*, 2016, p.1). The principle difference is the equal importance of safety combined with proper competitive techniques. But no matter what method of swim instruction offered, instruction has to be delivered and the message reach the intended audience to be of any use for survival. The cost of these private learn-to-swim programs are often priced out of reach for certain communities, and subsequently those who can afford to swim learn and thrive, and those who cannot afford to, often drown.

### *Public School Education*

In the United States of America there is no national curriculum which is detrimental to facilitating school learn-to-swim programs. “Swimming is one of the easiest, safest forms of exercise for children of all abilities, and school swimming is the single most effective way of teaching children how to be safe in and around the water” (The ASA Swimming Census, 2012, p.45). Money constraints contribute to the high cost of lives lost due to drowning, and even though life is priceless, financial burdens remain the biggest barrier of all. Swim lessons vary in philosophy and methodologies, but most all swimming lessons are associated with a financial cost attached. This financial burden often limits and excludes millions of children from participating in swimming programs perpetuating their risk, just because of socio-economics. This to me is criminal and believe that all children are of equal value and that their lives are priceless so swimming should be a part of the requirements in early childhood education. It is important to share in these costs through volunteer time, fiscal donations, and other collaborative means.

Education seems to be a key in the prevention of drownings and rescues and yet it is not fully being implemented effectively, if at all. In efforts to stop drowning, immediate defense is compulsory through more accessible learn to swim channels as should swimming be required of early education. Many children have had little or no exposure in swimming pools. This creates an unsafe reality. It is a human injustice that this preventable global epidemic continues to take life.

Tragedies should never become a reality if swim education had been made available at an early age. The obvious place to teach swimming begins in our schools, yet fewer and fewer offer aquatic safety, whether in part due to lack of funding, facilities, or even lack of curriculum.

Good news though, researchers in Florida are beginning to look at swimming benefits in congruency with their Physical Education standards and how imperative it is that their teachers be properly certified in aquatics stating, “that training could effect change in the implementation of APA within physical education, as well as in forging the opportunity of building cooperative relationships among school districts, curriculum specialists, community facilities, national aquatic agencies, and education professionals, possibly minimizing the issue of lack of facilities within under-resourced communities and programs” (Beale, Lynn, 2011, p.413). Although the research gathered in the Florida study conducted by Beale and Lynn also highlight that less than 10% of schools are actually including APA within their school requirements (Beale, Lynn, 2011). APA, Aquatic Physical Activity, or swimming in schools, can be a part of a free educational swim safety campaign within public schools, as shown in the as shown by the St. Croix Dolphins and St. Croix school districts, but more children need to have this opportunity. School administrations, principals, child care providers, physical education teachers and parents need to be at the forefront of learn-to-swim initiatives for the sake of our future generations and their possibilities. “More than just getting kids moving once a day, physical education helps children and adolescents develop and demonstrate the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness, while exhibiting personal responsibility and social behavior that respects self and others” (SHAPE, 2016, p.13).

Public school swimming is a not a new concept but it has left many public school students without the opportunity to learn and this can yield to tragic consequences. Minnesota has written legislation for promoting swimming in their curriculum, as has the United States Virgin Islands has begun to put into practice, in certain schools, not all, although it is required by law. A non-profit program that has been implemented in the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) which stresses the importance of water safety and drowning prevention for young Virgin Islanders is in direct response to a bill passed in the Virgin Islands local government regarding learn to swim. “The Virgin Islands Legislature has recognized the risk its youth population faces passed bill



number 28-0145 to help curb the lack of water safety knowledge among its youth” (Legislature of Virgin Island, 2009) still has a long swim ahead to make this a reality.

The Virgin Islands has created an initiative for water safety through swim education and although it is not fully integrated, as not all schools are participating, it has begun for select third graders in the district of St. Croix. This learn-to-swim program aims to provide free swim lessons to public school children and focuses on “working with public schools teaching children general water safety, proper swimming techniques, and confidence in and around the water” (Source Staff, 2013, p.1). “An act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5, section 41© to require instruction in swimming and water safety in public schools” (Legislature of the Virgin Islands, 2009) was introduced to require students one hour of swimming a week for one school year by certified instructors. “Title 32 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5 directs the Commissioner of Housing, Parks and Recreation to establish a water sports training program for instruction in swimming, diving and sailing” (Legislature of the Virgin Islands, 2009), however this agency is saying they do not have enough funds and that it should be the responsibility of the Department of Education to provide monies from their operating budget.

So while government entities point fingers at each other, the program which is underwritten by VI Law, is not running at optimal performance levels because of bureaucracy- a testament to our failing public school systems across the board. The price of learn-to-swim should not be out of reach for those who need it most. Swimming should not be only for those who can financially afford the cost but for as vast and diverse a population as possible. Learn to swim programs are just one more integral component in saving lives but they cannot work if you do not participate. Swimming is unique as it is the only highly competitive sport that can save a life. Swim lessons and water safety education that can expose more demographics to learning how to swim, will increase diversity in the sport while decreasing the death toll. This will ensure a future of children who will be able to enjoy aquatics for a lifetime.

Other factors that are also cost preventive and may attribute to the drowning rates include accessibility to guarded swimming pools as well as participation in swimming lessons from a qualified teacher and other expenses. Transportation issues as well as reluctant parents are additional reasons why children are being kept out of the water. (The 2012 School Swimming Census, 2012). It is a matter of life and death that swim instruction be available at low or no cost

to families. Without this as a universal goal, drowning statistics will continue to climb even though it is a preventable epidemic. Swim lessons should be an integral part of the public education system because it works and all children should have the equal right to life through swim.

*Every Child A Swimmer*

“Although the U.S. Virgin Islands is surrounded by beautiful beaches and coral reefs, there are many Virgin Islanders who do not know how to swim or do not feel comfortable at the beach. The Dolphins Swim Team wants to help make this the last generation that does not know how to swim” (Help Every Child Become a Swimmer, 2015, p.1). The St. Croix Dolphins in conjunction with the Department of Education has created *Every Child a Swimmer* in 2003 (St. Croix Dolphins), and since its inception has seen laws passed that mandate these swim lessons within VI public schools. This learn-to-swim program, sponsored both publically and privately, incorporates swimming as part of the educational experience. “ Numerous Acts in the Virgin Islands Session Laws appropriate money to the various swimming associations; however the existing law does not provide for instruction in swimming as a course of study in the public schools” (Legislature of Virgin Islands, 2009), hence its partnership with the oldest, and only, swim team on the island of St. Croix.

Last school year alone, 2015-2016, more than 200 3<sup>rd</sup> graders from St. Croix, USVI participated in the St. Croix Dolphins *Every Child a Swimmer*. “Research shows that if a child doesn’t learn to swim before the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, they likely never will” (Hohne, 2013, p.1). These students are on the cusp of becoming swimmers versus non-swimmers, yet I would encourage lessons to begin at a much earlier age. The soon to be swimmers came from five of the public schools in the district of St. Croix. The elementary schools involved in this most recent learn-to-swim program were Alfredo Andrews, Pearl B. Larsen, Claude O Markoe, Juanita Gardine and Eulalie Rivera Schools.

Their learn-to-swim pool is a great example of the safe environment recommended for optimal learning. The pool is small and shallow. The water is warm year round which is less stressing to the young child. “Water temperature is a key factor in the comfort of young children

in learn-to-swim” (Jorgensen, 2013, p.48), so it is important to control the environment as much as possible for the child’s comfort. The pool is secured with a fence along the perimeter and is staffed with qualified trained swim instructors. The once thought of hostile environment of water, an unexplored medium, as seen by a non-swimmer becomes calmer and inviting. This prime environment along with a caring and qualified staff has transformed the lives of many. “Most of the children participating were not able to swim the width of the pool when they started taking the lessons in October, but by the end of the program, 90 percent of the kids were able to swim across the pool, tread water and float” (Source Staff, 2013, p.1).

*Every Child a Swimmer* has benefited the island community thus far, yet has a long swim ahead in changing misconceptions of the swim culture. Exposing first time swimmers as well as their family members, many non-swimmers themselves, has transformed the swimming landscape on the island. Parents are encouraged to observe the lessons on deck which is a great way to engage swimming throughout the family, perhaps reshaping the way people feel about swimming. Early swimming education has created a new culture of active and responsible swimmers on the island of St. Croix. Many say they have gained more confidence in the water and will most likely pursue swimming as a sport. “A majority of the students who participate in this program are initially unable to swim, but today they are confident, alert and feel safe in the pool” according to the Dolphins Swim Team (Help Every Child Become a Swimmer, 2015, p.1). Although these lessons are only reaching a handful of the student population on St. Croix, it is a stroke in the right direction. The program continues to grow and the 2015-2016 school year saw a 35% increase in overall swimmers in the pool (Sanes, personal communication, May 28, 2016). Approximately 65% of these most recent student swimmers had previously “not been in a pool or taught any basic swimming skill” (Sanes, personal communication, May 28, 2016).

Out of the 237 third graders from St. Croix, U.S.V.I., which participated in the *Every Child a Swimmer* program in 2015-2016, some students swam away with more than a life-saving skill. They accrued school credits toward the physical education requirements, as well, according to Michelle Sanes of the St. Croix Dolphins Swim Team. Sanes also is encouraged that in the coming years working with the Virgin Islands Department of Education that more of the participating schools will also allow for educational credits towards the students physical education class. Sanes states, “I am hoping to work with the Department of Education to make it a requirement” (Sanes,

personal communication, May 28, 2016), with regards to obtaining school credit for their participation. This collaboration is a positive step towards keeping our children safe in and around water, while giving them the tools to live a fit and active lifestyle around the water, and reconnects them to the natural environment that surrounds and sustains.

Presently, I am teaching learn to swim and water safety as a swim instructor for the 2016-2017 *Every Child a Swimmer Program* on St. Croix, USVI. From the five schools who participated last school year, only three are enrolled to date. These three schools are Pearl B. Larson, Claude O Markoe, and Alfredo Andrews. There has yet to be a formal answer to address why two schools have left the program. This lack of transparency and accountability from our leaders begs to question if public policy is really working on the behalf of our youth. There is an urgency to have accountability among our policies and laws so that our actions actualize what has been promised to be delivered for the sake and well-being and very livelihood of our future. Out of these three schools, there are three classes, and a total number of 103 students who are in the swim lessons. More than half of this student population receiving swim lessons are girls and the remaining 35 students are boys. The ethnicity of these students is diverse, with the majority of students that are African-American, a quarter is of Hispanic descent, and with only a handful of Caucasians fill these lessons.

I have been working with these swimmers for only a few sessions so far, but what I have observed is consistent with the status quo of drowning statistics. Over 75% of these students have a persistent and real fear of the water which has led to an overall unfamiliarity with the aquatic environment in which they have not yet felt safe. Throughout these first few weeks more than half of the students are acclimating to being buoyant in the waters, and I know that the more exposure and guidance they have, this number will continue to grow. The hardest part is getting your feet wet, but once this is achieved- swimmers bloom, but they must have a safe place to develop these lifesaving skills.

Unfortunately, not every child is receiving this life saving skill and subsequently, St. Croix lost the life of yet another young child due to drowning. On May 26, 2016 eight year old, Jah-Marie Dimmer was attending a friend's birthday party at King Christiansted Hotel Pool in downtown Christiansted, St. Croix U.S.V.I., when this preventable tragedy occurred. Police noted

during the preliminary investigation, Jah-Marie was found motionless at the bottom of the pool according to another minor's report and was pulled from the pool. Steve Bullock, writer for the St. Croix Avis newspaper reports, "After the victim was pulled from the water, an individual from a nearby dive shop administered CPR. Dratte said officers also performed CPR, transported the female minor to the Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center, where all attempts were made to revive her" (Bullock, 2016, p.2). It is hoped that Jah-Marie will not be just another statistic, but a call for action, so that other children may not slip away silently.

Swimming must not be a silent killer any longer. Pools can be as dangerous as the open waters surrounding St. Croix. Bullock also reports that just 42 miles north of St. Croix on the island of St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. three men also became victims of drowning. Two of the three fatally lost their lives, while "a third victim was injured after experiencing difficulties while swimming at a beach near John Brewers Bay on that island on Thursday" (Bullock, June 26-27, 2014, p.2). It is time to end this epidemic and teach swimming as a lifesaving tool now before it is too late. Swimming is a survival skill but is also a gift to a child's development as it enhances the richness of life.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SWIMMING: FOR A HEALTHY LIFETIME**

#### *Swimming for Childhood Development*

Early childhood is the most rapid time for growth and development within the human life. "Therefore, early childhood is a period in development where environment actually has an important impact on determining how the brain and central nervous system grows and develops" (Early Childhood Development: The key to a full and productive life, n.d., p.2). This relevance to brain function and environment is most observable in the world of swim. This introduction into a new landscape, is best done at an early age as the young brain is more placid, just like in the waters longed to be swum in. With this recognized knowledge that there are many major milestones and periods of learning in early childhood development, it is advisable to teach swim skills at this

sensitive time of growth. “In early swimming lessons young learners are exposed to new experiences that extend their repertoire of skills, knowledges and dispositions” (Jorgensen, 2013, p.55). “If a child is given the opportunity to learn swimming, language or any other skill at a young age they will learn that skill faster and easier than at an older age” (Super Swimmers Foundation, n.d. p.1).

Swimming develops the body and mind at all stages in life, even infancy. “Unlike other physical or intellectual pursuits undertaken by children in the years prior to schooling, formal swimming lessons can commence at a much earlier age than other activities. Water familiarisation activities can start soon after birth with baby’s first bath and formal lessons start in many swim centres for babies as young as four months. No other baby-centered leisure activity commences at such a young age” (Jorgensen, 2013, p.1). “The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests “new evidence shows that children ages 1 to 4 may be less likely to drown if they have had formal swimming instruction” (Burgess, n.d., p.1). Swimming lessons along with water safety education are essential to minimizing the risks of drowning and research supports that timing is everything. The sooner you can swim, the better.

Swimming contributes to the brain development of children as supported by limited scientific studies that are beginning to dive into this topic. Research has found that learning within new environments is stimulating the brain’s development, so swimming in the aquatic environment can be seen as beneficial. “Babies come into this world with billions of neurons and they need stimulation because that's how they learn” (Smail, 2010, p.1). Even though young children have billions of neurons, they do not yet have many connections or experiences to activate their capacity for learning (Burgess, n.d.). Thus, the more exposure a young child can have to any particular stimulating environment, such as swimming, the more the brain is wired for healthy development. “As a baby moves and interacts with his world, the impulses flowing through his neurons stimulate the cell fibers to grow more branches and twigs reaching out to other neurons” (Burgess, n.d., p.1). Children begin learning from before birth. It seems plausible that expectant mothers who swim may indeed instill a connection to the acclimation of movement in water.

Sports, notably swimming, can contribute to the success of a young child’s development. “A child’s body is stimulated through exercise such as swimming. The mind is also stimulated

causing further brain development and an increase in intelligence” (Super Swimmers Foundation, n.d., p1). It is crucial then that young children are introduced to swimming in early childhood to reap these life-changing benefits and to build a safe foundation for future aquatic participation. Swimming is a physical skill that requires the development of body balance, strength and coordination. Swimming is widely known to be a good exercise for your overall health, but new research suggests that it is so much more.

### *Swimming Optimizes Learning*

Leading this exploratory study is Australian Professor Robyn Jorgensen, from Griffith University, who has developed a theory that swimming makes children smarter and has shown through her research that children who swim are actually scoring higher on other developmental areas as well. Jorgensen and her team of researchers are revealing that “children also score significantly better on measures that related to their visual motor skills (which includes skills such as cutting paper, colouring-in and drawing lines); gross motor stationery skills (e.g. standing on tiptoes, standing on one foot, imitating movement, performing sit-ups); oral expression (being able to speak and explain things, etc.); and achieving in general areas of literacy and numeracy and mathematical reasoning” (Jorgensen, 2013, p.3). Research continues to prove that within the school setting, it is the physically active children that are continually outperforming in academics above their inactive and unfit peers (SHAPE, 2016).

Swimming is great activity and exercise for children’s physical and mental health and well-being. Swimming can be a fun and exciting way to play while strengthening both the heart and lungs all the while aiding in the development of the young brain. When children are in water they develop their coordination and improve their balance, and when pool toys are involved, not only is it more fun, it improves their motor skills as well ( Sigmundsson & Hopkins, 2010). A 2009 study done by the Norwegian University of Science & Technology found that “babies who swim have better balance and can grasp objects more easily than non-swimmers”( Sigmundsson & Hopkins, 2010, p.1).

Babies not only strengthen their mind and body but it is proven that babies can even save themselves. The ISR learn-to-swim method exemplifies how children, even as early as just few months of age, can save themselves from drowning. The Infant Swimming Resource Self-Rescue

(ISR) program has more than 800 documented success stories. This learn-to-swim program was founded in 1966 with a pioneering vision that “Not one more child drowns” (Infant Swimming Resource, 2015) Safety is always at the forefront of the ISR and the program “emphasizes competence, which leads to confidence, and provides the foundation for a lifetime of enjoyment in and around the water” (Infant Swimming Resource, 2015, p.1). Swimming is essential for so many water sports and recreational opportunities.

The tangibility in the act of swimming assesses the five senses of the human brain which is vital in early human brain development (Super Swimmers Foundation, n.d.). Swimming is a multi-sensory activity since a swimmer can see, taste, smell, hear, and most importantly feel the water. All of these connections create a platform for the child’s future development for survival, physical, and emotional advancements. To gain from all that swimming offers, one must practice the act of moving through water for all the benefits to absorb just like a sponge. It is during these early stage years in development that makes swimming encouraged at an early age, even medically advisable.

### *Prescribed Swimming*

Research suggests that swimming cultivates more than the physical being. Swimming is a great outlet for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, ASD. ASD is a generalized categorization “for a group of complex disorders of brain development” (Autism Speaks, 2016, p.1). The number of children who are being diagnosed with varying degrees of autism is on the rise as well as the medications prescribed to treat it. “Autism statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identify around 1 in 68 American children as on the autism spectrum—a ten-fold increase in prevalence in 40 years” (Autism Speaks, 2016, p.1). So with the increasing statistics it is imperative that the approaches to treatment should be implemented for these children specifically to include the sport of swimming. “In addition to promoting health, swimming reduces stereotypic behaviors and increases social behaviors of some children” (University of Kansas Medical Center, 2016, p.1) who face the challenges of living with ASD. Swimming should be prescribed as a means of therapy for the 3 million Americans plus tens of millions worldwide who suffer from ASD (Autism Speaks, 2016).



Social situations are often difficult for a child with ASD and communicating becomes quite a struggle. Swimming becomes an activity that can alleviate the need to focus on others and in turn become introspective in the solitude rhythm of the sport. The practice of swimming has a fluidity over the senses which may help with anxiety in children. Children with ASD often feel overwhelmed by external stimulus, because sensory issues affect communication skills (Autism Speaks, 2016). A seventeen year old on the autistic spectrum is competing soon in the U.S. Nationals, Charles Cobbert, says “swimming helps me feel calm” (Oliver, 2015, p.1).

A more well-known Olympic swimmer who suffers from ADHD, Michael Phelps has proved swimming can be a tool for his success despite having been diagnosed as a child (Wedge, 2012). ADHD, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, by definition “is a brain disorder marked by an ongoing pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development” (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016, p.1). Phelps was able to wean off medication for his ADHD and was able to find focus through the sport of swimming. Not every child will have the same story as Phelps but can find motivation from his success and be encouraged to try swimming as part of their routine. There are alternative options available aside from prescription pharmaceuticals to treat ADHD. Sport can be the medicine. Instead, “23 million prescriptions for ADHD medications are written each year for American children” (Wedge, 2012, p.1).

Yet again, swimming has been shown to be good medicine for children’s health. Research suggests that engaging in swimming practice can be recommended for treating asthma symptoms in children. “The activity has been proven to be an effective non-pharmacological intervention for children and adolescents, according to a study in *Respirology*, published by Wiley-Blackwell” (Wiley -Blackwell, 2009, p.1). Speaking from personal experience, symptoms of childhood asthma can discourage children to be physically active due to the breathing difficulties of having this condition. Feelings of shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing, chest pains, even fatigue are a few of the characteristics of childhood asthma (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2016). Children given the opportunity to swim can succeed in managing asthma and can even become Olympic Champions. Olympic Gold medalist, Misty Hyman, had been diagnosed with childhood asthma at age 5. Her doctor, like many others, suggested Misty take up swimming because, “It is the best therapy for

kids with asthma” (Leading Ladies, 2013, p.1). In this article in Leading Ladies, Misty also credits the sport of swimming for improving the strength of her lungs as well as her quality of life. She continues to give back to the sport of swimming through coaching and hosting clinics throughout the United States.

Swimming is not a cure for asthma but it is a beneficial activity that strengthens lung function. Another Olympic swimmer with adolescent asthma is Karen Pickering. Pickering’s story is very similar to that of Misty Hyman, as only a few years separate their asthmatic diagnosis. Her doctor diagnosed her at age 7. Pickering states, “My doctor recommended that I take up swimming and despite the fact that I suffer from exercise induced asthma & am sensitive to chlorine, swimming improved my quality of life by strengthening my lungs” (Pickering, 2016, p.1). The act of swimming brings awareness to the act of breathing. This fluid connection with our own ability to sustain air flow using breath control while propelling through liquid is a therapeutic act.

Having basic swimming skills will indeed expand life’s horizons so it is important to start early and swim until old age. Even though early exposure to the sport is shown to be beneficial for a plethora of reasons, it is never too late to start. Swimming truly is a lifelong sport and does not discriminate based on age. In fact, the United States Masters Swimming, USMS, is a prime example of how swimming can keep us youthfully alive at any age. Masters swimmers continue to make time for the water as and are those who have swam and keep swimming into a healthy life of optimal longevity. Master’s swimming is a worldwide competitive swimming program for people over the age of 18. They are usually former competitive swimmers but they welcome all ages and abilities. Darra Torres, a 48 year old and five time Olympian, has motivated thousands of Americans to get back in the pool and is a true ambassador for swimming as a lifelong sport. Torres began swimming in her early childhood and began International competitions at age 14 (daratorres.com n.d.). “At the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, Dara became the oldest swimmer to compete in the Olympic Games” (daratorres.com, n.d., p.1), she is also a twelve time Olympic medalist. Swimming is a sport that can grow with you gracefully into a strengthened older age. This sensational and fluid movement through the water is an activity that tantalizes our senses and is weightless, so it is safe on the bones as we age.

## CHAPTER VI

### SWIMMING: BROADENING AQUATIC PURSUITS

The ability to swim is already a heroic feat which may one day save your life or the life of another. Swimming builds a floating platform which values teamwork, individual success and it gives a child more than just one competitive team sport. It fills our reservoir of life's potential and a clear channel for other pursuits. For example, a child in the U.S. Virgin Islands who knows how to swim does not necessarily need to become a competitive swimmer. For those who love the water and know basic water safety, there is a plethora of aquatic adventures that can be explored.

The International Swimming Federation (FINA) and other International Organizations have taken up the cause of stopping this preventable epidemic of fatal drownings. FINA is the International Organization on seven aquatic sport disciplines, including swimming, diving, high diving, water polo, open water swimming, masters and synchronized swimming. All of these sports take place in the aquatic environment and all require basic swim skills and water safety skills. Without a foundation of swimming skills these disciplines would not be possible so the need for swimming is essentially imperative and for so many varying and proven benefits. If a child can swim, they can enjoy a multitude of sporting aquatic disciplines. Three of which are a part of the Virgin Islands Olympic Federation: swimming, sailing and triathlon.

Surfing has just been introduced as an Olympic Sport and will debut in Tokyo 2020 (International Olympic Committee, 2016). The International Surfing Federation, ISA which is recognized by the International Olympic Committee, has just recognized the U.S.V.I. Surfing Federation in 2015 as becoming the newest member of the International Surfing Association, ISA. "The International Surfing Association (ISA) is recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as the World Governing Authority for Surfing, Stand Up Paddle (SUP) Surfing and Racing, and all other wave riding activities" (Aguerre, 2016, p.1). Now, a dozen young VI athletes who are stand up paddle-boarders will have the opportunity to race internationally and participate in one of the newest and fastest growing water sports. "Surfing is one of the most visible and inspirational extreme sports, practiced on all continents, and loved by countless millions of fans" (Aguerre, 2016, p.1).

Sailing is yet another path young Virgin Islanders may participate in. Sailing not only is mode of transport around the islands, it is a popular and successful division of the Virgin Islands Olympic Team. I had the opportunity of being at the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in Singapore in 2010, where myself and five Virgin Island Youth Olympians celebrated the Gold place finish of Ian Barrows, of St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. Since then, the V.I. youth sailors continue to exceed expectations and showcase their talent on the water. When a young island child can be actively involved in an aquatic sport, they ultimately broaden their horizons.

The Virgin Islands Triathlon Federation has also been successful at reaching out to younger generations of Virgin Island athletes and supporting healthy active living within the island community. Throughout the year, they host a series of Junior Races for youngsters as young as five years old. The introduction to the sport of triathlon is done in a non-intimidating format that allows for various formats and distances appropriate for the age of the child. Notably, swimming is regarded as one of the toughest legs of the swim-bike-run race. Yet again, giving the advantage to the child athlete who is confident in the water. As a volunteer lifeguard at many of the junior triathlon races, I have noted many swimmers from the St. Croix Dolphins Swim Team become participants and winners of these events, time and time again. Swimming really does give them a leg up not just in the world of sports, but also in the professional field as well. Professions such as the navy, fireman, and coastguard all require aquatic training, so even if a child is not an athlete, swimming can prepare them for life.

### *Swimming for Peace*

Swimming is good for survival. It is good for the body and the mind. Swimming can also lead to personal freedom. Annette Kellerman, Olympic swimmer and female water pioneer of the early 1900's states, "Swimming cultivates imagination; the man with the most is he who can swim his solitary course night or day and forget a black earth full of people that push" (Sherr, 2012, p.7). This sentiment rings true today as globalization and progress has created an environment of ever increasing trade and mass migrations across the open waters. "Globalization is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas and other aspects of culture" (Boundless, 2015, p1). Unfortunately, war persists and is ever-present across

the planet. Could the words of Kellerman lead us to finding our own inner peace through swimming?

Sport, as a universal language, can also be a powerful vehicle to promote peace, tolerance, and understanding. Through its power to bring people together across boundaries, cultures, and religions, it can promote reconciliation, reduce tensions, and generate dialogue” (UNICEF, 2007, p14). It is this common language that has brought the world together unlike any other endeavor and it is at the Olympic Games that this peaceful ideology is symbolized and even felt by spectators and athletes alike. Sports have the ability to bring out the best of our human experience. Every person should have the opportunity to participate in sport. Sports becomes the vehicle that can harness change for the betterment of the human condition. These collaborations are powerful and essential to promoting a better human existence through sport, specifically swimming, as it is more than sport, it is life. Swimming can `bring more to a person’s existence than merely survival.

Peace through sport is the defining and unique characteristic of the Olympic Games today. Just as the Olympic Truce, Ekecheiria, was observed during sporting contests of the Ancient Olympics, it still is the underlying and ambitious mission of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Games. It was the revitalization of the Olympic Games and Truce that has created an ideology of a better and more peaceful world through sport. “The Truce stood as a testament of harmony and goodwill that the Games symbolized, and was the impetus for the model of the modern Games as a means of improving friendship and foreign relations” (Low, 2006). The Olympic Games then are not just a sporting competition but also a social movement towards inclusion and unity.

“Sport as a universal language, can also be a powerful vehicle to promote peace, tolerance and understanding. Through its power to bring people together across boundaries, cultures and religion, it can promote reconciliation, reduce tensions, and generate dialogue” (UNICEF, 2007, p.14). Even though we may not see world peace in this lifetime, as swimmers that peace of mind is found in the water. If more children are raised in a swimming culture maybe peace on earth is possible.

“On the global level, sport can serve as a compelling symbol for peace. The United Nations General Assembly recognizes the potential of sport to support the building of a peaceful and better world, and since 1993 has endorsed the Olympic Truce in advance of the Olympic Games. Worldwide, there is an increasing recognition of the power of sport as an international messenger of peace” (United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, n.d., p.15). Sport, governed not by politics but by each International Federation of sport, continues to inspire, connect, change lives and teach valuable lessons in humanity and is interconnected with the diplomatic process- swimming is no exception.

It has clearly been established that swimming does come with risk if not properly prepared but that swimming can be a tool that can save lives. However, swimming is so much more than that. Swimming has the transformative and therapeutic effects on the individual as the solitary act forces one to focus on the breath, our life source. This deep channeling of the swimmers meditating mindset on the breath of life creates a space where dreams grow big. Swimming requires a balance of mind and body. It shows Olympism in practice. “The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.” (Olympic Charter, 2014)

The action of swimming allows the person to learn many things, including Olympism. One learns how to breathe, how to stretch, how to stay afloat, how to recreate, how to be safe. C.S. Lewis said, “Swimming lessons are better than a lifeline to the shore” (Lewis, 1949, p. 189). Swim lessons end up being more than swim lessons, as they are shown to broaden a child’s view of the world and help him develop good habits, confidence, self-assurance and focus. Swimming provides a balance of the mind /body connection, and can create a strong being who exemplifies discipline, social skills, good habits, exercise, and almost a spiritual connection to water itself.

Sadly, hundreds of thousands of people are not experiencing a peaceful existence. As people across the globe face challenges and conflict in their regions, they dream of a life better than that which they already know. They realize they must make sacrifices to achieve a better existence. For decades the world has watched many thousands of people cross the world’s waterways desperate to make a new and better life for themselves. This mass migration over the

seas creates an environment that is uncharted and uncertain, and often ends in the unwarranted loss of life. “Refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people in search of protection often use overcrowded and unsafe vessels to reach safety” (World Health Organization, 2014, p.32). The CDC reports that nine out of ten people who drown in boating accidents are not wearing life jackets (CDC, 2012).

The haunting image that provoked the emotional outcries of many around the world was that of a young Syrian boy found lifeless on the beach near Bodrum. After leaving the coast of Turkey that tragic day twelve bodies, including five children, were recovered. Only nine people are thought to have survived that day only making it to shore with the aid of life vests (Keane, 2015). This horrific reality spread across news headlines and has sparked an uproar around the world over the travesty and severity of this crisis. Chief executive of the charity Save the Children, Justin Forsyth, commented on this tragic image. He said this was indeed a shocking reminder of “the dangers children and families are taking in search of a better life” (Keane, 2015, p.1). Hundreds more have tragically lost their lives in the migration water crossings. This horrifying reality is happening more frequently because of the boats sinking which is often a result of overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels that do not have adequate life vests for all aboard. It is crucial for all the world organizations to make efforts to prevent more life lost out in the open waters. The International Olympic Committee may be the heralding voice for this cause with the announcement of the creation of an International Refugee Team in Rio 2016 Olympic Games. “Bach said Olympics officials are hopeful that the refugee team will represent displaced people throughout the world. They will, he added, “send a signal to the international community that refugees are our fellow human beings and are an enrichment to society” (Voice of America, 2016, p.1).

Among even the darkest of days there will always be light and the hope of a better promise for humanity. We do live in a time of considerable inequality where many negative events are happening time and time again, yet thankfully the human spirit continues to shine on. Looking at the story of another Syrian refugee demonstrates this possibility of positivity amongst all that is array. Yusra Mardini, an 18 year old has literally just swam for her life across the Aegean Sea when fleeing her war torn country. Mardini had been traveling to Europe on the open waters on a small and over -crowded dingy after fleeing from Damascus. She was alongside of twenty other

souls seeking a new and peaceful life. These twenty people were cramped on board a vessel meant for six and were in danger of capsizing after the motor stopped working. Mardini along with her sister and another passenger quickly reacted and jumped overboard in a successful attempt at pushing the boat and its non-swimming passengers all the way onto shore. She beat the odds amongst hazardous conditions and saved the lives of those with her. “Only four out of 20 on the boat knew how to swim. It would have been shameful if the people on our boat had drowned”, says Mardini (Marche, 2016, p.1). Mardini’s quick action and strong swim skills not only saved her life, but that of all twenty lives on board.

Mardini, who represented Syria at the 2012 FINA World Swimming Championships had always dreamt big dreams. Her hopeful spirit along with her sporting ability has her among the many athletes seeking to represent all refugees in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Rami Anis is a fellow Syrian refugee from Aleppo who fled his home during the onset of the Syrian War. He is a swimmer who fled Turkey to Greece then on to Belgium where he is preparing for his debut on the first Refugee Olympic Team. “Following the approval of Olympic Agenda 2020, the IOC’s strategic roadmap for the future of the Olympic Movement, and in light of the current global refugee crisis, the IOC created a special fund of USD 2 million to develop relief projects through sport in collaboration with NOCs around the world” (Team of Refugee Olympic Athletes (ROA) created by the IOC, 2016, p.1). This fund has helped fuel the efforts and training of these phenomenal athletes amidst their personal hardships. The athletes were also supported by each one of their host National Olympic Committees in preparation for the Games as well as their new lives in their new countries. These ten athletes will be able to showcase their success and highlight their stories on the stage of the world’s premiere sporting mega-events.

These refugees see themselves simply as athletes who want to represent themselves as ambassadors of all those who have found themselves displaced, presently 59.9 million refugees according to the UN. These athletes will get to compete under the Olympic Flag as an unprecedented team of Refugee Olympic Athletes (ROA). Once again proving sport knows no boundaries. IOC President Thomas Bach states, “By welcoming the team of Refugee Olympic Athletes to the Olympic Games Rio 2016, we want to send a message of hope for all refugees in our world. Having no national team to belong to, having no flag to march behind, having no national anthem to be played, these refugee athletes will be welcomed to the Olympic Games with



the Olympic flag and with the Olympic Anthem. They will have a home together with all the other 11,000 athletes from 206 National Olympic Committees in the Olympic Village” (Team of Refugee Olympic Athletes (ROA) created by the IOC, 2016, p.1). The Olympic Village will be home and the Olympic teammates will become family. Bach reaffirms the ROA stating, “It is a signal to the international community that refugees are our fellow human beings and an enrichment to society. These refugee athletes will show the world that despite the unimaginable tragedies that they have faced, anyone can contribute to society through their talent, skills and strength of the human spirit” (Marche, 2016, p.1)

As we see the world get more compact and interdependent among all nations, new global policies and practices must be implemented to ensure a healthy humanity for all, no matter what part of the world we come from. The Olympics although a non-governmental agency, can generate a tsunami effect for good within the waters of Olympic Solidarity and other governing bodies. The partnership with the International Olympic Committee, a non-governmental organization and the United Nations, a governmental organization are in agreement that no one entity can solve the world’s problem, but that with a cooperative effort, a better existence is possible. Former IOC president Jacques Rogge states, “We can’t change the world on our own, but we can and do make it a better world” (Wassong, n.d., p.448). Mirroring this sentiment is seen by United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon in his reaffirmation that this partnership will remain intact because, “Olympic principles are also the principles of the UN” (Wassong, n.d., p.448).

As we become global citizens we share the right to have our human rights guaranteed and protected as we celebrate our differences as well as our similarities through sport- most notably the sport of swimming. Mardini’s participation at the Olympic Games in Rio will certainly draw attention to the immigration crisis, but most significantly it will generate hope and joy for Syrians and other refugees as well as millions of people around the world. She says, “I want to show everyone that after the pain, after the storm, come calm days. I want everyone not to give up on their dreams. I want everyone to do what they feel in their heart even if it’s impossible. After the war will stop and I will go back with experiences with everything and I will teach everyone what I had here” (Marche, 2016, p.1). This is truly representative of the Olympics. Through sport, the true beauty of human nature is revealed.

Culture, human rights and environmental concerns are among the byproducts that will be highlighted during these coming Olympic Games in Rio, as the world watches with anticipation. Even though the International Olympic Committee is not a political governmental entity its mass appeal can influence change and peace through sport as the world is watching as one. “As the world gets smaller, through globalization, our approach to social issues will reconnect us to the fundamental basic rights of humanity which are protected by the United Nations. One such right is the ability for any persons to practice sport without discrimination” (Olympic Charter, 2014, p.13). All children, not just those of privilege, should have the opportunity to learn how to swim.

Swimming can be the savior sport for all regardless of economic affluence, religion or country. The practice of swimming is a real life-saver which can bring peace of mind and survival skills. Only when water safety and drowning prevention is addressed globally, and taught locally, will this unnecessary and preventable epidemic be reversed. The fact that swimming is construed as a wealthy white man’s sport born out of recreation and leisure time, limits the availability, at least conceptually, to the low income areas which are often at a greater risk of becoming the next victim. It is crucial that there are learn to swim educational programs available for all. Drowning is preventable. It is imperative to acknowledge this rising epidemic globally and act on it locally. “It is vital that tackling drowning prevention in low- and middle-income countries is done using strategies tailored to the local context” (World Health Organization, 2014, p. 19).

A great example of this tailoring to specific needs in a cultural context can be adapted locally, is the option of providing Muslim young girls the ability to practice swimming without the accompaniment of males present. A female instructor in an all girls’ class can easily be one way for swimming to accommodate for modesty of young girls, a factor inherent in the Muslim religion. Other accommodations for addressing the modesty needs for covering the body for a young Muslim can be facilitated through the full body suits now common on the competitive swimmer. Culture does influence the swimming world and subsequently can impact the demographic of swimming as a result. The swimming communities need to allocate equal opportunities for all citizens of the world and support those who are at the forefront of diversity and inclusion in swimming. “Twenty-seven countries do not send women to the Olympics because of Islamic dress codes” (Schaffer & Smith, 2000, p.102). Swimming can break cultural stereotypes and bond us

together, not by our nationality, religious belief or income, but because we are all athletes at home in the water.

### *Swimming for the Environment*

Environmentally speaking, the Olympics has pledged to be environmentally responsible ever since the 1992 Olympic ‘Green’ Games in Lillehammer. Our planet is our home so it is critical to take care of the resources that keep us alive. It is the accessibility to water that can create a culture of swimmers versus non swimmers. President John F. Kennedy connected humanity to the ocean noting that we are more intertwined than maybe we are aware. He said, “All of us have in our veins the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are WE are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea we are going back from whence we came” (Sherr, 2012, p.43). As with all things in life, when one is an active participant, one gains the confidence to live to the fullest of human potential.

It is evident that the importance of water is crucial for our daily life is crucial, and not just for our sporting life. It is our most valuable natural resource that sustains life. Now is the time to protect this most essential natural resource- water. All of humankind has the right to clean water and this is one right we must always advocate for especially in today’s ever increasing over population. Rights to water and water safety will pose challenges for the future of all. Lewis Gordon Pugh, an avid open water swimmer and adventurer deduces, “Swimming has been a very effective medium for telling a story about the state of the planet” (Galant, 2010, p.1). The swimmer simply cannot exist without it- nor can any of humankind. All countries and nationalities will benefit from the implementation of a water safety plan (World Health Organization, 2014).

In 2000 the Millennium Development Goals were developed by the United Nations to fight poverty across the globe, and to create an environment geared towards equality, and to increase the quality of life for millions, both young and old. These social goals were targeted to end in 2015, and these efforts have made great strides towards its goal. Although conditions have improved, they have not yet been eradicated. The fight to end all forms of poverty continues with the addition of seventeen new goals and agendas called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that are drafted within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. “The new Goals are unique

in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet” (Promote Sustainable Development, n.d., p.1) were set into action by the UN on January 1, 2016.

The secretary general of the United Nations recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking-water as a human right. The need for water makes it a "human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights" (The Human Right to Water and Sanitation, n.d.). The planet Earth is composed of 70% water, of which only 3% is fresh water and the remaining 97% is saltwater. Unfortunately, even with all this volume of liquid, billions of people go without access to sanitary drinking water much less clean water to swim in. “Clean, accessible water for all is an essential part of the world we want to live in. There is sufficient fresh water on the planet to achieve this. But due to bad economics or poor infrastructure, every year millions of people, most of them children, die from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene” (Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all, n.d.).

Contaminations of human waste as well as arsenic and fluoride found in the water of low income populations undermine water safety and quality. “Faecal contamination of drinking water, which is a leading cause of the 4,000 daily deaths from diarrhoea amongst children under the age of five” (Water, sanitation & hygiene, n.d., p.1), is evidence that the youngest of our world’s children are again at high risk around water. The end result can lead to death. “The crucial importance of water to so many aspects of human health, development and well-being led to the inclusion of a specific water-related target in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)” (Water, n.d., p.1).

“People in low- and middle-income countries interact with water very differently to those in high-income countries, and the general level of economic and social development in low- and middle-income countries means exposure to water is riskier” (WHO, 2014, p.26). At times, these issues seem worlds away for those living in modernized places, but the truth is we all are affected by these injustices and corruption every day to variant degrees. Water quality and sanitation needs to be at the forefront of equality at every level, regardless if you live in a developed nation or developing one. In Flint, Michigan, many Americans were rudely awakened with the threat of water contamination in their homes when high levels of lead were found in the

city's water supply. The population affected is of a low income bracket and it raises the importance of our water rights no matter how much money one has. Money indeed influences and prioritizes one's needs over another. This financial gap continues to divide human beings and has a negative impact on so many, including the environment. It is of all our responsibility to protect this precious resource, water.

Shockingly, "663 million people in the world live without clean water" (World Health Organization, 2014), and many who live in the Western world are not even aware of this fact until it hits closer to home. This alarming figure, on average "one out of ten people worldwide, or twice the population of the United States" (Charity Water, 2016, p.1), will have to face life without easy access to safe water. This is unacceptable and is being aggressively addressed by all nations through strategic planning and global progress through sanctions of the United Nations. There is progress on this platform, but still much needs to be done to make clean and safe water available for all human beings.

Many women and children across our planet must walk countless miles to collect their daily water needs. "Just under half the world's population have no access to piped water, meaning water holes, wells or surface water are the only water sources for drinking, washing, cooking and daily household chores" (WHO, 2014, p.26). Often long and treacherous journeys allow families to secure their water allotments. This life essential trek can create conditions unfavorable for a quality education. "Not only does walking for water keep kids out of school or take up time that parents could be using to earn money, but the water often carries diseases that can make everyone sick" (Charity water, 2016, p.1). Something must be done because when our basic needs and rights are granted, education is more feasible. Education leads to a life of learning. Learning builds knowledge. Knowledge improves one's confidence. Confidence can empower people's dreams which transforms into reality. Reality in turn becomes a better state of mind.

"Every year, more people die from unsafe water than from all forms of violence, including war" (Water for Life Decade, n.d., p.1). Without proper water sanitation and hygiene, germs can multiply and create fatal conditions for many people, especially millions of children. Thus, it is of great importance for every person to support this initiative through their purchasing power. Putting the power of economics towards charitable causes is a powerful tool that can bring about positive influence and desired change. In other words, change in your pockets can bring real change to the

world, if consciousness is behind the transaction. Business has recognized the potential purchasing power of the emerging consciousness of the modern consumer. It feels good to spend money when you feel you are contributing to a greater good. It is important to support those who pledge to donate to these efforts while providing a life-saving service. One such entity, SwimPro brings awareness through education and donations. SwimPro pledges its commitment to clean water, “100% of your donation will directly fund freshwater projects in developing nations. Just \$20 can give one person clean, safe drinking water” (The Swim Pro, 2013, p.1). Unfortunately, the change is mostly ending up in the already heavy pockets of the ones in charge, leaving no fit infrastructure for the millions of others in need.

In the world of International Sports, sports is big business, and those who have, have lots. The stakes are high and so are the itemized bills. Corruption is indeed apparent in the sports governance international arena. National pride is on the line, egos can become inflated, elitist attitude and entitlement can sweep over any organization drowning them in corruption and ultimately undermining their own mission to the ideal purpose of sport- Olympism. International Federations have recently been exposed to the underlying corruption and greed within their organizations. These despicable actions of overspending and corruption lead to an unbalance of power and can cause extreme disparities within sport.

For instance, members of FINA are known to love their per diem accounts which provide them with a five-star royalty treatment. As observed from afar from my personal experience at the 2010 Youth Olympic Games in Singapore, I have witnessed the grandeur of expense for the upper level members of FINA compared to that of the soul and spirit of the Games- athletes, coaches and volunteers. The lavish legacy coming of the top tier of the swimming elite can deplete the funds for the obvious necessities in swim culture: educating those most at risk for drowning- demographically those with little to no resources. “The per diems, the limousines, universality of gravy-train lifestyles that is not matched by universality of excellence and development many decades after FINA made such things a central plank in its Constitution” (Lord, 2016, p.22). The Olympics is not an affordable affair by any means and its power and wealth are one of the strongest brands in the world. With this comes great responsibility. The Olympics, the world’s most recognizable brand, has a big influence on capturing the world’s attention on more than just sporting issues, and they have been adversely criticized in their exclusivity and lavish spending.

The truth is that it is unethical for the world not to take notice on the injustices and inequities within IF's. Communities must reinvent the good nature of sports by demanding a call for new regulations and transparency in their respected sporting culture. FINA and NOC's need to cut back on the lagniappe in order to fund the real necessities that can change the way humans' access and experience the aquatic environment. There needs to be accountability and action to expose FINA's exuberant spending to ensure that the mission and values are more than conceptualizations but is Olympism in action. The need is for an increase in funding of early-childhood learn- to- swim programs and water safety plans to stop the preventable loss of life. This funding should trickle down from the competitive stakeholders, such as the IOC and FINA, USA Swimming to directly benefit at risk youth, because without young people having early exposure to the sport only perpetuates the drowning epidemic while limiting the sport's own future growth and potential. Swimming integrated in the education system, would be the logical place to teach a new generation that our dependence and interdependence to water is the key to our survival. It seems logical that since "the human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses" (The Human Right to Water and Sanitation, n.d., p.1), FINA would allocate its funds from bottom up instead of the other way around.

Water safety is significant to swimming because for swimmer's to utilize the world's waterways, for recreational or competitive swimming, the global community must recognize the need to keep our ponds, lakes, rivers, and oceans clean. There are over 90 million Americans that swim in open water each year (CDC, healthy swimming facts, 2015). All people should have the opportunity to participate in the sport safely and free from potential environmental hazards, but reality paints a different picture. Many developing nations have raw untreated sewage draining into their precious waterways which is a huge environmental problem, and this is the case as well for the waterways of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Several investigations have found dangerous levels of viruses along with high concentrations of bacteria flowing into the Guanabara Bay, the Rodrigo Freitas Lagoon and the famous Copacabana Beach, venues of the 2016 Olympic Games. This is not a new problem for Rio but it was one that should have been solved before the commencement of the Olympic Games. "Rio won the right to host the Olympics based on a lengthy bid document that promised to clean up the city's scenic waterways by

improving sewage sanitation, a pledge that was intended to be one of the event's biggest legacies” (Brooks, 2015, p.1).

Sadly, they were mistaken as there have been numerous reports that show there is a growing concern for Rio’s water quality and the safety of athletes at the summer 2016 Olympics fast approaches. Rio’s water pollution is linked with illnesses among aquatic competitors and is once again raising concerns about the potential health risks for the hundreds of athletes may face at the 2016 Summer Olympics. “Rio Mayor Eduardo Paes admitted this month that officials had “missed an opportunity” to address local water pollution and asked the International Olympic Committee to step in and provide guidance on how to proceed before the Olympics” (Barrabi, 2015, p.1). As the 2016 Olympics unveil, environmental aquatic conditions will take center stage, as the pollution remains a high concern.

“The report also included an update on water quality testing in Guanabara Bay, which will switch from monthly to weekly testing as of May and daily testing at Games time, according to World Health Organisation (WHO) parameters”( *IOC Executive Board concludes first meetings of 2016*, 2016, p.1 ). With the environmental water hazards in Rio not eliminated, extra prevention measures are being executed specifically for the Games. Sailing’s world governing bodies are concerned for the atypically highly polluted water conditions that they are keeping a close watch utilizing helicopter patrol, floating barriers to contain the trash flow from drifting into the bay, microbes that naturally decompose pollutants as well as safety briefings for all involved. (Associated Press, 2016).

Rio also faces another environmental threat according to the World Health Organization. The Zika virus, which is spread by the bite of a water borne mosquito is causing many to be concerned. This just shows yet again, that water can be a deadly breeding ground. Bringing environmental issues to light within a sporting context may increase the awareness and call for immediate action on tackling this environmental concern not just for sports, but for life.

It is imperative that the planetary health is governed properly for today and future generations. The Youth Olympic Games and its education programs that incorporate environmental concerns can help reshape future of the planet’s health. Instilling a love and



understanding of the sport of swimming can create a culture of mindful environmentalist athletes whose affinity and passion for the sport of swimming can positively affect water with regards to pollutants. Swimming outreach programs aimed at learn-to-swim and clean water initiatives are out there. Using swim lessons as a tool to teach young children the importance of water safety with the right to clean water may actually create an environmental consciousness to create a better existence for all.

Young swimmers from the St. Croix Dolphins Swim Team exemplify our symbiotic relationship to nature through environmental service around their island of St. Croix. By cleaning up debris along beachfronts, these young swimmers show appreciation for the health of the environment. Taking care of the environment is a by-product of swimmers in action. These swimmers are acting locally to make a huge impact of the environment for not only themselves, but the wildlife, visitors and aquatic life. The next beach cleanup is scheduled for June 7, 2016 in coordination with other activities to engage the island youth in celebration of Virgin Islands Olympic Month. (Virgin Islands Olympic Committee, 2016). The Virgin Islands Olympic Committee sets up many events during June to spread the Olympic Values. The program continues to give opportunities to our youth and enhances the world we live in through service, discipline, and a sense of community.

## **CONCLUSION**

Water is the most abundant and essential element of human existence. The human body is made up of 60% water by weight. Our planet is composed of 70% water. Water is found throughout our bodies, in all of our cells, tissues and organs. It is everywhere yet not always available or even safe, but our connection to water is vital for life. Humans are able to live for about one month without food, but they can only live three to five days without water. Many people who are lifelong and avid swimmers say they are not quite their best selves without a swim. Swimming becomes compulsory to living life. Humans, not just of the swimming kind, are in fact dependent on this precious resource as it is essential to life, as well as health. It is important that humans foster their connection to water for a life of health and longevity within a healthy community and safer world.

As we watch the motion of a wave moving across the water, there are some things that can be seen (white foam) and some that cannot be seen (undertow). As the sport of Olympic swimming moves into the future it will be interesting to observe how changes, seen and unseen, will affect the next big splash in the world of swimming. "Sport alone cannot enforce or maintain peace. But it has a vital role to play in building a better and more peaceful world" (Rogge, 2007, p.1) as eloquently said by Dr. Jacques Rogge, former IOC President. Partnerships between the IOC and UN will reinforce the initiatives of Olympism as a platform for using sport as a vehicle for social change around the world. The goal of world peace may be elusive but it is important that the NGO's and GO's work together in recognizing the need for a better human existence. Since sport is a universal language and global human right, it has the potential to connect us all for the cause of good. And may one day everyone has the same familiarity to water as they do to a soccer ball. The power of swimming will continue to bring nations and individuals closer to achieving a healthy and harmonious life.

In the sport of swimming, there have been many pioneers who have pushed the envelope and questioned the ways inclusivity and societal norms are reflected off the waters. When swimming first embraced women in the competitive waters so too did women's rights prevail towards equality of the sexes. Swimming is now facing yet another great disparity, racial divide, and is noticing the need for more diversity from its own reflection. A call for racial equality is echoing across the tide and swimming may once again be the life saving pathway to promoting equality for all. The need for swim safety ambassadors should be heard loud and clear across the lakes, ponds, rivers and oceans that separate us and bringing public awareness and education to masses and schools could be the platform needed to restore Olympism among the diverse world we live and promote equality throughout these waters.

Great Ancient societies have been built up around water sources as water equates life and sustainability. Hold true to the fact that the power of swimming is much greater than simply staying afloat, instead it is a tool to swim against the current to achieve a better condition both above and below the surface. People have swam for centuries before us and, will hopefully always have a safe place to swim into the future, but presently, the need to readdress swim culture is evident to unite one kind- the swimming kind.

The risks of drowning is all too real and impacts so many that is why laws to not only be written, but enforced to assure every child is learning how to swim. Communities must assess their own needs within their specific locations and develop and implement appropriate strategies to reduce the risk and save young lives. Keeping future generations safe is a responsibility and priority of us all. Global governing bodies have begun to streamline the rise of consciousness regarding the threat and impact of drowning. This is an important step in ensuring that swimming leaves behind a positive lasting legacy. The ability to swim and knowledge of water safety skills can help decrease child mortality. All the while, swimming is contributing to provide the child with the best possible conditions for overall human development.

It is through learn-to-swim educational outreaches that will one day save a life, possibly your own or of someone you loved. It is imperative that knowledge and resources are made available to diverse populations that emphasize swimming as a life-saving skill, not just a competitive sport. The lack of water safety skills, as well as a lack of early intervention through education, has created this epidemic of drowning and water related injuries. The data indicates that the rates of drowning are climbing even in countries known for their powerful performances in the water, including the United States and its territories. Swim lessons are not the only one part solution in saving lives from the drowning epidemic, other layered strategies must be also tackled. Other strategies that reduce the threat of possible drownings or water related injuries will also need to incorporate a multifaceted approach and a collective effort. This could include early childhood swim education programs, safety prevention measures, and applied safety skills through supervised practice. And even though practice makes you better, one must always be aware of critical environmental factors that can also influence risks around water. Drowning does not discriminate, nor should learning to swim. “Drowning also has important intersections with a range of major agendas, including climate change; mass migration, including of asylum seekers; and child and adolescent health. The multisector nature of drowning prevention demands improved coordination across various agendas and sectors” (WHO, 2014, p. iii), so it is time to come together and close this divide.

As a professional member of the swimming community, I have over a decade of diverse experiences in and out of the water. The stories and stereotypes among swimmers vs non-swimmers is often inherited and not inherent on any truth. The statistics for drowning victims is

alarmingly rising yet prevention is possible. Several lives were lost recently on my island community of St. Croix, U.S.V.I. This scenario is all too real and cultivates a fear of water which is detrimental for so many. Swimming education is imperative to reshaping the swimming landscape especially in communities with higher risks of drowning. I am hopeful though, for the future of the swimming culture in reducing the drowning rates among young children. Positive change is happening and through my research and personal observations and experiences with diversity in aquatics I am ever more convinced of the power of swimming- it is life.

Creating a culture of safe swimmers who are responsible for protecting our connection to water creates awareness which brings change. The desired change is that of a water world filled with educated, happy and healthy little swimmers who are living examples of Olympism. Swimming is not just so you can survive in life, but ensures can you thrive in life. The body and brain work together, a child who is on a physical development program will have greater brain capacity than a child who is not” (Doman, n.d., p.1). Mind and body connections are important for the overall health and well- being within childhood development. These mind and body connections strengthen the overall development of the young child, especially when they are allowed physical play and movement exercises in the aquatic environment. Proper swim instruction and continued practice will facilitate a child’s ability even affinity for being in the water.

Swimmers are ever drawn to the aquatic environment for life, just as human survival is dependent on its connection to water. Thankfully, the swimming culture in America, and the world, is changing. More diversity in aquatics is necessary to help reshape old held myths and swimming stereotypes. When every child regardless of gender, race, or religion can fully develop their swim skills is when there will be a decrease in childhood drowning rates, especially among the minority populations. The availability to play sports without discrimination is an essential human right supported by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Olympic Charter, 2014), and so is the right to life. Learning to swim is the vehicle in which to conceive such an existence. Swimming is life just as water is life. The faces that reflect back at us in the turbulent waters, often mirror the world at large, thus it is imperative for us all to see ourselves as a member of the swimming family- for a healthier existence for us all.

Swimming is a life-long sport and a life skill that can save you both inside and out. Swimming is a sport for life, both literally and figuratively. The health of the individual and global community is at stake, and swimming is the vehicle to a better existence. Accessibility to clean water is a basic human right just as accessibility to sport is a basic human right. The relationship between global sport and human rights is dually noted. Sport is a universal language that has exponential influence to the well-being of the entire planet. Collaborations and partnerships are needed in the world of swimming to ensure the strength of the learn-to-swim movement- so that not one more life slips below the surface.

Swimming programs can deliver individualized results that can lead to living a more fulfilled and healthy life and are most influential with early participation. Swimming indeed is beneficial for a child's development of both physical and mental health. Creating a generation of safe swimmers will reduce the rising rate of drowning and will our connected waters of life flowing peacefully. "There is much to be gained from increased coordination and collaboration across the sectors that shape drowning risk, from fisheries to maritime transport, and from disaster risk management to health, education and rural development" (World Health Organization, 2014, p. 35). One stone thrown in the pot is not enough to make the waters rise.

Try to imagine standing anywhere in the world on a shore of some body of water. Imagine seeing a person far out in that water who appears to be in dire stress trying to stay afloat and get back to safety. Imagine if that person had learned to swim as a child. This person would not fight against the water in war-like struggle for life but would calmly surrender to the water floating and moving forward as one. The understanding of basic swim skills and an appreciation for the power of the water can be lifesaving. Swim lessons will "equip them with the tools they need to be confident in and around water so they don't lose out on the health benefits of exercise, the opportunities to bond with family and friends and the sense of accomplishment when they learn new skills" (YMCA, 2016, p.1).

There is a connectedness in this imagery. A person safe, confident in the hostile elements, positive of survival because he/she was prepared with the necessary life-saving skills preparing him/her for a fulfilled life, senses their purpose on this shared home we call Earth. Esther Williams, proclaims, "Somehow I kept my head above water. I relied on the discipline, character and strength that I had started to develop as that little girl in her first swimming pool" (Sherr, 2012, p.34). From

birth until old age, swimming is a lifelong sport that needs to be a part of every child's life for more than just success in the pool or open waters, but for a more enriched life. It has been proven that "children who participate in swimming achieve a range of milestones (skills, knowledge and dispositions) earlier than the normal population" (Jorgensen, 2013, p.55). Learning to swim is of great importance for the health and well-being of our future generations. Swimming has been shown to be an accessible sport for everyone regardless of ability, race, or gender and is beneficial to the mind, body and spirit. With continued efforts within the swimming communities to make swimming not a financial burden. With this commitment ultimately more children will grow up safe in and around water.

Swimming indeed fosters Olympism, as it strengthens the body, enhances brain function and development, and cultivates a spiritual connection to the places we swim. Swimming develops the body and mind to achieve its optimal potential and pleasure in this fluid element. The body is suspended in flowing water, while the mind can drift in silence and spirit is free to dream big. Swimming for life is a great skill that is also a gift to the enjoyment of life. Swimming is so much more than a sport. It is life. Swimming transcends our connection to the sanctity of water, swimming for some is a religion. Swimming goes beyond transforming lives and is uniquely the only sport which can in turn save a life, even your own. It is a sport that takes courage to relax in a foreign environment, trust in one's buoyancy, and glide with your inner fish. One final thought to remember, as said by the character Dori in Finding Nemo, "When life gets you down do you wanna know what you've gotta do? Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming. Swimming. Swimming. Swimming. Swimming. What do we do? We swim, swim" (Stanton & Unkrich, 2003).

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