In this essay, I will examine Gretchen Reynolds’ article “Will Simone Manuel Inspire More Black Children to Swim?”. In this article, Reynolds gives evidence as to why she argues that very few black individuals know how to swim compared to white individuals. The article makes the claim that there has been a significant history regarding blacks in competitive swimming such as segregated swimming pools, attacks at pools towards blacks, and institutional racism in the context of pools, meaning that pools were often only available to whites and not blacks. The article goes on to state that certain actions may aid black individuals to be able to swim. I mostly agree with Reynolds’ statement, but there are certainly more areas of inequality in competitive swimming. In expanding the argument, I will focus on textual analyses, or historical evidences as further proof of inequality. In this essay, I will give an analysis of Reynolds’ argument, evaluate the evidence she gives, and expand on her argument.

Reynolds’ argument is accurate and I will show exactly why. The article argues that far less blacks know how to swim compared to whites of the same age range, specifically children to teenagers. The social inequality that perpetuates this is institutional racism and this is reproduced through stereotyping, which is an overgeneralized belief that a certain trait, behavior, or attitude characterizes all members of some group (Newman 2015). In fact, 70% of blacks have no swimming ability at all (Irwin 2010). Given such a vast number of blacks cannot swim, this reinforces the idea that all black people are without the ability to swim. Moreover, according to statistics calculated by USA Swimming, far more black persons drown every year at a rate of 5.5 times the number of whites of the same age (Irwin 2010). This too deepens the stereotype that blacks cannot swim. The social institution in which this inequality is reproduced is the institution of USA Swimming or sports. In competitive swimming, there are far less black
individuals in the sport as compared to whites. According to statistics from USA Swimming’s 2014 Demographics Report, 31% of swimmers identified as white on the ethnicity section, while only 1% identified as white (USA Swimming 2014). Although it is important to note that 55% of participants did not list an ethnicity, there is still a marginal difference, showing that the inequality is reproduced in the institution of sport itself. I certainly agree with this argument, as I myself have seen similar events that reflect these statistics. Additionally, this argument applies to black and white individuals. This is primarily because the article refers to black individuals, given they cannot swim very well. It also applies to whites due to the fact that the swimming ability of black persons is being compared to that of white persons. There exists additional research that would only support this argument. Besides the article’s use of surveys, we can use textual analysis, or the use of historical documents to discover older trends of swimming inability in blacks. For example, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 restricted blacks’ access to various swimming pools (Jewish Americans...). This created a barrier for blacks to be able to practice survival techniques in the pool and thus lead to a lack of swimming ability in the near future.

In this section, Reynolds’ sources will be evaluated type of research used and how it could be improved upon. In her article, a majority of the evidence is based upon data from both USA Swimming and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although she does use a personal experience in the article, it is only used to give an example of how the research reflects reality. The research used is strong because it is strictly based upon surveys as per USA Swimming’s research and the CDC’s research. Surveys are often advantageous because they are able to represent large groups of people and are reliable in that respect. They can be disadvantageous, however, because there is less control over the research (Kelley 2016). As
discussed earlier, textual analysis would strengthen the argument in giving it a more historically accurate representation, instead of mainly referring to current events. Nonetheless, Reynolds has strong evidence to support her claim.

In this segment of the paper, I will expand on Reynolds’ argument with regard to gender inequality in competitive swimming. One example of gender inequality is through the 1500m race at the Olympics. In fact, the 1500m race is only held for men and not women. This means that Katie Ledecky, the women world record holder for the event was not able to compete in that event at the Rio Summer Olympic Games (NBCOlympics 2016). Another stark example is in that of percentage of women compared to men competing in the Olympics. In addition to the fact that women were only allowed to compete in swimming at the Olympics in 1912, women have always been the minority in the Olympics. Over the past few years, it has become closer to even but in 1992, women made up less than 30% of the people competing (Women… 2016).

In this paper, I argued that I agree with Reynolds’ argument that racial inequality exists in competitive swimming. I also argued that she has strong evidence to support such a claim, but that her argument would be stronger if she had included textual analyses. I also showed how gender inequality exists in competitive swimming. Through this paper, I learned that inequality is far more prevalent in swimming than even I (a swimmer!) had previously thought. I enjoyed being able to connect sociology to a topic that was of my own volition to choose and was a topic I actually enjoy. Personally, I would’ve changed the due date of the paper to before break, because when a paper is assigned before and is due after break, it often is forgotten about until the last minute. Through this paper, I’ve learned that using a sociological perspective to examine events is crucial to understanding how the world really works.
Works Cited


USA Swimming. “2014 Membership Demographics”. PDF.


NBCOlympics. "With No 1500m in the Olympics for Women, Katie Ledecky Is out of Luck." NBC Olympics.