

## ABSTRACT

**MANI, M. J. Effects of Special Olympics participation on community integration among school-aged participants with mild to moderate cognitive disability. M.S. in Exercise and Sport Science - Special Physical Education (Adapted), May 2002, 50pp. (P. DiRocco)**

The purpose of this study was to compare the amount of community integration between an experimental Special Olympics participant group and a control group comprised of non-Special Olympics participants. Fifteen school-aged (8-18) subjects (7M, 8F) made up the experimental group and fifteen subjects (6M, 9F) made up the control group. The Special Olympics group was equally matched with the non-Special Olympics group in regards to sex, age, and intellectual characteristics. The comparisons were based on measures from a thirty-minute interview devised by Malik, Ashton-Schaeffer, and Kleiber (1991). The Malik et al. interview examined general recreation, as well as physical and social community integration. The Special Olympics group participated in a supervised year around Special Olympics program. The control group did not participate in any Special Olympics games or events. Both groups were from the greater La Crosse area. A chi-square test showed no significant difference in the amount of community integration between the experimental and control groups ( $p < .05$ ). In summary, not participating in Special Olympics was found to be as effective as participating in Special Olympics in terms of increasing community integration. Therefore it may be other factors that dictate the amount of community integration as opposed to participating in a Special Olympics program.

**EFFECTS OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS PARTICIPATION ON  
COMMUNITY INTEGRATION AMONG SCHOOL-AGED PARTICIPANTS  
WITH MILD TO MODERATE COGNITIVE DISABILITY**

**A THESIS PRESENTED TO  
THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
MASTER OF SCIENCE DEGREE**

**BY  
MARK J. MANI**

**MAY 2002**

COLLEGE OF HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION,  
RECREATION, AND TEACHER EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

THESIS FINAL ORAL DEFENSE FORM

Candidate: Mark J. Mani

We recommend acceptance of this thesis in partial fulfillment of this candidate's requirement for the degree:

Master of Science - Exercise and Sport Science - Special Physical Education (Adapted)

The candidate has successfully completed the thesis final oral defense.

Pat Di Paolo 6/10/02  
Signature of Thesis Committee Chairperson Department Date

Kay S. Mathrey ESS 6/13/02  
Signature of Committee Member Department Date

D. D. Hielant DES 6/10/02  
Signature of Committee Member Department Date

This thesis is approved by the College of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Teacher Education.

A. Anderson 6/25/02  
Associate Dean, College of HPERTE Date

R. Daniel Duggett 6/26/02  
Director of University Graduate Studies Date

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the following people, without whom this would not have been possible:

To my wife Karin, who without her love, support, input, statistical assistance, sacrifice, and encouragement this thesis would not be possible.

To my two beautiful children, Tina and Josh, for being my pride and joy, and providing me with encouragement along the way.

To my mother and father, Arlene and Louis Winkelhake who are always there providing love and support.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In pursuit of this degree, I have many people to thank and acknowledge:

My chairperson, Dr. Patrick DiRocco for your advice, guidance, and patience throughout this process. Your time, support, and humor have been greatly appreciated and have made my graduate experience a very memorable one.

The Associate Dean of HPERTE, Dr. Garth Tymeson, for your valuable time and support in helping me complete this thesis.

My committee members, Dr. Hal Hiebert and Dr. Ray Martinez, for your help, support, and cooperation with this study.

The La Crosse Association for Responsible Citizens, especially Penny Steege, and La Crosse Area Special Olympics program, especially Bill Fisch for making this study possible. Your time and support have been greatly appreciated.

My classmates, K.J. Mikelbank for his humor, Bridget Degesu for her support and encouragement, and Bob Weigel for his statistics assistance. You made my 11 months at UW-L very memorable and enjoyable.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Special Olympics recently celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of providing competition and sports training for individuals with cognitive disabilities. Special Olympics has a current roster of over one million athletes and a multimillion dollar budget which makes it the largest sports organization in the world for athletes with cognitive disabilities. However, as Special Olympics enters its third decade, special education professionals continue to question the value and appropriateness of Special Olympics (Bersani, 1990; Hourcade, 1989; Stein, 1987). In addition, there are conflicting data indicating about whether Special Olympics participants are more or less competent than individuals who participate in other community-based recreation programs (Storey, Stern & Parker, 1990).

Over the past two decades, researchers have evaluated Special Olympics and found many limitations to the program (Bersani, 1990; Hourcade, 1989; Stein, 1987). These limitations range from offering only segregated programs for athletes with mental retardation to offering nonfunctional activities such as the 50 meter dash and the softball throw (Bersani, 1990). A variety of suggestions for improving Special Olympics have been given. In the years since many of the critical reviews have been published, Special Olympics has made a variety of changes to its program. For example, Special Olympics now offers a variety of training and competition programs to include athletes without

disabilities, and they offer a great variety of sport opportunities including lifetime leisure sports (Special Olympics, 1991).

However, these changes appear to be insufficient to many special education professionals who continue to criticize Special Olympics. For instance, Bersani (1990) suggested that many Special Olympics activities prevent the development of integrated community-based recreation programs. He also suggested that the majority of Special Olympics activities are nonfunctional, age-inappropriate, and segregated. A leading disability advocacy publication, The Disability Rag, criticized Special Olympics for not doing enough to get its athletes into existing community-based sports programs (Staff, 1987). Hourcade (1989) suggested in his study that Special Olympics be changed to meet the "contemporary needs of its constituency" (p. 64).

Nevertheless, as with the assertions favoring Special Olympics, there has been very little empirical evidence offered in support of criticisms. A closer evaluation of the impact of Special Olympics on community integration was conducted by Kleiber, Ashton-Schaeffer, Malik, Lee and Hood (1990). In their study, caregiver's perceptions of improvement in physical and social competence were associated with participation in Special Olympics. However, there appeared to be no relationship between involvement in Special Olympics and how the participants perceived improvement in community integration. The researchers also found that Special Olympics involvement may affect individuals in different ways according to their level of disability.

A study conducted by Wilhite and Kleiber (1992) also found that the level of disability had an influence on the relationship between Special Olympics participation

and indicators of community integration. The researchers found that involvement with Special Olympics may be influential in community integration for individuals with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities. However, participation in Special Olympics may have had a deflating effect on community integration for individuals with a mild cognitive disability, even though it was positively associated with perceived improvement in physical competence (Wilhite & Kleiber, 1992). A study conducted by Dykens and Cohen (1996) indicated that Special Olympics participants have higher social competence scores and more positive self-perceptions than a comparison group comprised of non-Special Olympians.

Needless to say, the picture demonstrating the effect of Special Olympics participation on peer and community integration is unclear at the present. Although Wilhite and Kleiber (1992) demonstrated that Special Olympics involvement affects individuals in different ways according to their level of disability, no research exists concerning the effects of age of Special Olympics participants on community integration. Since the effect that age has on the perceived benefit of Special Olympics participation on community integration has yet to be investigated, further research is clearly warranted in this area.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived benefit of Special Olympics participation on community integration among school-aged participants with a mild to moderate cognitive disability.

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is there is no significant difference in perceived community integration between Special Olympics participants and non-Special Olympians who are in the 8-18 year age group.

## Definition of Terms

Special Olympics – an international program of year-round sports training and competition for individuals with cognitive disabilities. Participants have to be at least eight years of age.

Mental Retardation – significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period (Rimmer, 1994).

Mild Cognitive Disability – a person who scores between 55–70 on a standard intelligence test.

Moderate Cognitive Disability – a person who scores between 40–55 on a standard intelligence test.

Community Integration – reflected in measures of physical integration (the various places the respondent frequents) and social integration (the range of people with whom he or she interacts).

School-Aged Special Olympics Participants – individuals between the ages 8-18 years old and identified by an agency or professional as having one of the following conditions: mental retardation, cognitive delays as measured by formal assessment,

**significant learning or vocational problems due to cognitive delay that required specially designed instruction (Special Olympics, 1993).**

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Despite a lack of empirical evidence, much has been written in the past two decades about the positive and negative aspects of Special Olympics participation. Pleasure and enjoyment derived from participating in a supportive and reinforcing atmosphere, increased social contacts, gains in physical fitness and recreational skills, improved self-esteem, higher peer acceptance, opportunities to experience success, and gains in self-help skills are examples of the benefits attributed to participation in Special Olympics (Dykens & Cohen, 1996; Krebs, Smith, & Martch, 1991). Yet, Special Olympics has its share of critics and has not been without controversy (Wehman & Moon, 1985). Most notably, critics believe that Special Olympics participation is stigmatizing and limiting, especially for individuals with mild disabilities. Whether intentional or not, participation tends to emphasize individual deviations or differences (Brickey, 1984; Orelove, Wehman, & Wood, 1982). In addition, Special Olympics participation may not facilitate achievement of maximum potential of higher functioning participants (Brickey, 1984; Hourcade, 1989; Polloway & Smith, 1978). Criticism has also focused on the competitive nature of Special Olympics participation and the lack of emphasis on practical or functional physical and recreation skills related to lifelong community and leisure involvement (Hourcade, 1989; Wehman & Moon, 1985). This review of related literature will (a) briefly describe the history of Special Olympics, (b)

discuss the positive aspects of Special Olympics, (c) discuss the limitations of Special Olympics, (d) examine Special Olympics in the 1990s and determine if Special Olympics has responded, via programmatic changes, to the criticisms pointed out by professionals, (e) examine the effects of Special Olympic participation on community integration, and (f) offer a summary.

### History of Special Olympics

The concept of Special Olympics began in the early 1960s when Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the former chairperson of Special Olympics International, started a day camp for people with cognitive disabilities in Maryland (Johnson, 1991). From that experience, Mrs. Shriver and others realized that persons with cognitive disabilities were far more capable of participating and competing in sports than many experts of the time believed. In 1968, Mrs. Shriver organized the first Summer Special Olympic Games (ISSOG) at Soldiers Field in Chicago. These inaugural games included athletes representing the United States, Canada, and France. Athletes competed in track and field and aquatic events (Johnson, 1991; Special Olympics, 1991). Today, over one million athletes with cognitive disabilities representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and over 100 countries worldwide including China and the USSR are involved in Special Olympics. The 1991 ISSOG, held in Minneapolis, included over 6,000 athletes from over 100 countries, 2,000 coaches, 30,000 volunteers, 10,000 family and friends, and 25,000 to 50,000 spectators each day (Special Olympics, 1991). Competitions were held in 10 official sports and 6 demonstration sports. In addition, more than 2,000 athletes

competed in the fifth World Winter Games in 1993, in Schmalding/Salzburg, Austria (Special Olympics, 1993).

Special Olympics is now a multimillion dollar nonprofit agency organized and administered through local, state, and national offices under the guidance of Special Olympics International headquarters in Washington, DC. The program continues to be supported financially by charitable donations from businesses, agencies, and individuals. While there are paid staff members at all levels of the organization, the vast majority of Special Olympics coaches, area coordinators, and event directors and support staff are volunteers from local communities (Special Olympics, 1991)

The philosophy of Special Olympics is basically the same today as it was in 1968. That is, people with cognitive disabilities can, with proper instruction and encouragement, learn, enjoy, and benefit from participation in individual and team sports, adapted as necessary in order to meet the need of those with cognitive and physical limitations (Special Olympics, 1993). Special Olympics officials feel that consistent training is indispensable to the development of sport skills, and that competition among those of equal ability is the most appropriate means of testing those skills, measuring progress, and providing incentives for personal growth. Special Olympics officials state:

Through sports training and competition, people with cognitive disabilities benefit physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually; families are strengthened; and the community at large, both through participation and observation, is united with person with cognitive disabilities, in the environment of equality, respect, and acceptance (Krebs et al., 1991, p. 11)

Many professionals, parents, and citizens with cognitive disabilities have strong positive feelings about the Special Olympics. Each of these aspects will be discussed briefly.

First, it is recognized that children and youth with cognitive disabilities, especially those with more severe physical and mental handicaps, are motorically unable to perform on the same level as the typical individual who is non-disabled (Sherrill, 1981). Therefore, the Special Olympics program often has the effect of minimizing differences in the athletic and motor ability by having children with cognitive disabilities compete at their own level. Most Special Olympics athletes are afforded the opportunity to experience success merely by participating in the Olympics and by being reinforced by their teachers, parents, and peers.

Second, Special Olympics often provides the participant with many favorable and supportive contacts with a variety of other children and adults. As in any community-based activity, the student benefits from speaking and listening to other persons. In addition, athletic events are generally non-threatening and fun, thus giving Special Olympics a warm and reinforcing atmosphere. The pleasure and enjoyment derived from this type of social contact has been a major argument advanced by proponents of Special Olympics (Polloway & Smith, 1978).

Third, most schools prepare the students prior to the actual competition. In some cases, this training is year-round. It can be argued that the benefits of training extend beyond the specific demands of the Special Olympic events. These benefits include the acquisition of general motor abilities (e.g., balance, coordination, and strength), specific

athletic skills (e.g., throwing and catching), and social and language skills (e.g., following directions, waiting one's turn, and sportsmanship) (Krebs et al., 1991).

Fourth, parents tend to respond favorably to their children participating in Special Olympics and feel it is a wholesome experience for participants. It has been cited as an excellent vehicle for promoting more active school-home relationships and for providing social involvement and support for parents (Orellove et al., 1982). Brickley (1984) reported that Special Olympics provided parents with something in which they could participate and helped them feel they were better parents.

Finally, because of the publicity and recognition it has received, the Special Olympics program has become a highly visible and widely accepted community event. A large amount of human and financial resources have been devoted to Special Olympics by local businesses, charities, and civic groups. This wide base of support may produce positive effects on the layperson in the community, as well as the local school board members toward special services in general. In addition, the program attracts a large number of volunteers who are or may eventually become teachers, health professionals, or active members of the community. Without a doubt, Special Olympics has been a major event for which community members can contribute their time and money. Therefore, Special Olympics is an excellent vehicle for providing recognition for children and youth with cognitive disabilities.

#### Limitations of Special Olympics

While many professionals feel strongly about the positive impacts of Special Olympics, there are also professionals who are critical of the program. Critics argue that

although unintentional, Special Olympics can have a negative impact on the lives of children with cognitive disabilities. Each of these criticisms will be briefly discussed.

First, a strong argument comes from proponents of the principle of normalization as described by Wolfensberger (1972). These individuals feel that grouping persons with cognitive disabilities together into one competition is abnormal. In addition, the notion of non-disabled individuals viewing individuals with disabilities can set a negative self-fulfilling prophecy about the deviant characteristics of individuals with cognitive disabilities. Polloway and Smith (1978) state that because of this format, Special Olympics often evokes sympathy and pity.

Second, since Special Olympics athletes only train and compete with other athletes with cognitive disabilities, these athletes will miss out on the opportunity to train and interact with athletes who are non-disabled (Orelove et al., 1982).

Third, critics argue against the amount of time spent training for events that are considered to be non-functional, or of low priority in the overall development of persons with cognitive disabilities (Moon & Block, 1992). Events such as relay races, 50-meter dashes, and softball throws are felt by some to lack importance when compared to basic living, play, communication, and social skills. In addition, many professionals are only exposed to the one day event of Special Olympics, and feel that the amount of practice dedicated to such an event is a drawback when compared with the need of ongoing community recreation activities (Orelove, et al., 1982).

Fourth, Special Olympics has become a highly competitive event at area, state, and international levels. One can question whether professionals and parents have lost sight of the original participatory focus of Special Olympics.

#### Special Olympics in the 1990s

A re-evaluation of Special Olympics in 1996 reveals that Special Olympics offers a variety of programs that encourage the integration of persons with and without cognitive disabilities (Krebs et al., 1991). In addition, Special Olympics now offers a variety of sports programs, many of which focus on functional, lifetime leisure sports (Special Olympics, 1991). When compared to the Special Olympics program of 15 years ago, Special Olympics has made great strides in its overall program. Perhaps the most important change is that Special Olympics is now a viable recreation option for individuals with and without disabilities in many, if not all communities. Unfortunately not all local programs have implemented the changes and still only offer the traditional one day event. Professionals who only see the old format taking place may continue to view Special Olympics in a negative manner. Special Olympics must do a better job of ensuring that all local programs follow the new changes and improvements made to the program.

#### Effects of Special Olympics Participation on Community Integration

In a recent study of the impact of involvement with organized athletics on individuals with cognitive disabilities (Kleiber et al., 1990), caregiver and athlete perceptions of improvement in physical and social competence were associated with participation in Special Olympics. There appeared to be no relationship, however,

between involvement in Special Olympics and perceived improvement in community integration. In the study conducted by Malik, Ashton-Shaeffer, and Kleiber (1991), interview response validity among individuals with cognitive disabilities was established. Using the same interview techniques developed by Malik et al. (1991), Wilhite and Kleiber (1992) conducted an investigation to look more closely at this apparent lack of relationship between involvement in Special Olympics and improvement in community integration, taking into account level of disability and the perception of the individuals themselves. The result of the investigation conducted by Wilhite and Kleiber (1992) indicated that the relationship between participation in Special Olympics and community integration was progressively negative among individuals with a mild cognitive disability, while progressively positive among individuals with moderate to severe disabilities.

#### Summary

Involvement with Special Olympics by individuals with cognitive disabilities has been thought by many to contribute to well being of participants in a variety of ways. Others view involvement with Special Olympics as a potentially negative influence. Some attention has been given to the subject of community integration in past literature. The concept of the severity of the disability influencing the type of association between Special Olympics participation and community integration has been somewhat established for young adults (19-28). Research on perceived improvement that Special Olympics has on community integration of school aged children has yet to be investigated.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of participation in Special Olympics on community integration among school-aged participants who have mild to moderate cognitive disabilities. The researcher will ascertain if a positive correlation between Special Olympics involvement and community integration exists. Special Olympics participants will be matched to a control group of non-Special Olympics participants on age, sex, and intellectual characteristics.

#### Subjects

An experimental sample was solicited from the greater La Crosse area Special Olympics team. The selected subjects were divided into three age groups of 5 members each. The age groups were 8-11 years, 12-14 years, and 15-18 years. The disability classification of interest for this study is students with mild or moderate cognitive disabilities. A control sample of boys and girls was solicited from a pool of non-Special Olympics students from the greater La Crosse area. The age, sex, and intellectual characteristics were matched to those of the experimental group.

#### Recruitment Procedures

The researcher contacted Special Olympics personnel and gave them a detailed description of the testing procedure, protocols, and purpose of the study. The Special Olympics personnel contacted the caregivers of perspective subjects providing them with

details of the project. Those individuals volunteering to participate were contacted by the researcher and an interview date was arranged. Volunteers for the control group were obtained through the assistance of area advocacy group personnel who contacted the caregivers of perspective non-Special Olympics subjects, providing them with a detailed description of the project. Those individuals volunteering to participate were contacted by the researcher to arrange an interview time.

### Variables of Interest

Community integration was assessed from reports of the Special Olympics participants themselves as to how much actual involvement they have had at home, outside the home, and beyond the confines of the Special Olympics program. This was assessed with an interview procedure (see Appendix A). From the interview procedure, community integration was reflected in measures of general recreation (the various things the respondent likes to do at and away from home), physical integration (the various places the respondent frequents) and social integration (the range of people with whom the respondent interacts).

### Informed Consent

Upon arrival at the subject's residence for testing, subjects and their caregivers were presented with an Informed Consent form to be filled out and signed by the caregiver (see Appendix B). The subjects already had a detailed description of testing procedures, protocols, and purpose of the study given to them, via telephone, by the investigator. The Informed Consent form reiterated the procedures involved with

participation in the study. Confidentiality was explained and assured. The investigator answered any existing questions at that time.

### The Interview

Special Olympics and non-Special Olympics participants were given a thirty-minute 19-item interview. Interviews were conducted in the respondent's home. The interview addressed the recreation and leisure activities of individuals and their perceptions of how involvement with Special Olympics affects them. The interview included questions about leisure activities at home, away from home, and general recreation events in the community. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer introduced himself and engaged the respondent in a brief period of "small talk." After about 3-5 minutes, the focus was returned to the interview with a brief explanation of the purpose of the interview. The respondents were told that there are no right or wrong answers. They were also told that if they did not want to answer a question they did not have to, they could stop anytime for a break, and they could end the interview at any time.

Questions were read to the respondent during the interview. When a respondent appeared to have difficulty understanding a question, paraphrasing was substituted until the respondent understood. Questions that are paraphrased were marked with an asterisk and counted with answers in the "doesn't understand question" category. The interviewer gave three prompts for all open ended questions (e.g., "how often do you go to a friend's house?"). The interviewer completed a subjective summary of his general

impression of the interview and any unusual circumstances encountered during the interview. Each interview was conducted without interruption.

Reliability (interview-reinterview stability) and validity of the items were established at acceptable levels (Malik et al., 1991). The measures of community integration provided by the interview include general recreation, as well as physical integration and social integration items. General recreation tendencies were reflected in responses to questions about what they liked to do away from home and what they liked to do at home. Physical integration was reflected in responses to questions about things they have done in the past 12 month such as going to a movie, a sporting event, or the library. Social integration was reflected in responses to questions about whether or how often they did things with other people, including visiting friends at their homes, visiting relatives at their homes, and spending time doing fun things with neighbors. The response format for both sets of items included an initial yes or no. If the individual said yes, he/she was asked how often. The responses were divided into a lot, sometimes, not very often, or unsure/don't know/don't understand categories.

### Special Olympics Program

In keeping with the purpose of this research, the degree of involvement in Special Olympics was a variable of interest. Program records revealed that participation in organized competition ran the gamut of Special Olympic sports including volleyball, basketball, track and field, swimming, skiing, bowling, and roller-skating. This researcher believed that in order to truly measure what effect Special Olympics played in the role of community integration, he must evaluate athletes who fully participated in the

program, i.e., at least two events at each state games attended and regularly attended practice sessions.

### Statistical Treatment

A chi-square with repeated measures was utilized to determine whether a significant difference existed between results from the non-Special Olympic athlete group and the Special Olympic participant group. The chi-square formula was chosen because of the existence of non-qualified data representing two independent variables. For the two-way chi-square test, the null hypothesis always makes a statement about the lack of relationship between two qualitative variables in the underlying population (Witte, 1993). In this case, most generally, it makes a statement about the lack of a relationship between amount of community integration and the type of general recreation in which a person participates. More specifically, this is the same as claiming that the amount of community integration among school-aged participants doesn't depend on whether they participate in Special Olympics.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the amount of community integration in school-aged individuals between an experimental Special Olympics participant group and a control group comprised of non-Special Olympics participants. The comparisons were based on measures from a thirty-minute interview devised by Malik, et al., (1991).

#### Subjects

Subjects were asked to participate in a thirty-minute interview. The study took place over a three-month period, from April through June 1996. Thirty subjects volunteered to participate in the study with 15 belonging to the experimental group and 15 belonging to the control group. The factor that determined which group each subject would participate in was whether or not they participated in a Special Olympics program. The researcher contacted area support groups and agencies to gather information on potential subjects for the study. Table 1 presents the descriptive characteristics of the subjects in both groups. The Special Olympics group was equally matched with the non-Special Olympics group in regards to sex, age, and intellectual characteristics. There were five subjects in each of the three age categories across both experimental (n = 15) and control (n = 15) groups. The number of males and females was approximately the same for both experimental and control groups. The breakdown by age groups reveals that the 8-11 year old group was comprised of 4 males and 1 female for the experimental

group, and 2 males and 1 female for the control group. The 12–14 year old group was comprised of 1 male and 4 females for the experimental group, while the control group was comprised of 2 males and 3 females. The 15–18 year old group was comprised of 2 males and 3 females for the experimental group, while the control consisted of 2 males and 3 females. Overall, the experimental group was comprised of 46 percent males, and 54 percent females. The control group was comprised of 40 percent males and 60 percent females. The average age of the 8–11 year old group was 9.8 in the experimental group and 9.6 in the control group. The average age for the 12–18 year old group was 13.6 in the experimental group and 16.8 in the control group. The overall average age was 13.5 years for the experimental group and 13.3 for the control group.

In addition, intellectual characteristics were compared and were found to have no significant differences between the two groups. The 8–11 year old group was comprised of 2 subjects with mild CD (cognitive disability) and 3 with moderate CD for the experimental group, while the control group was comprised of 3 subjects with mild CD and 2 with moderate CD. The 12–14 year old group was comprised of 2 subjects with mild CD and 3 subjects with moderate CD for the experimental group while the control group had 4 subjects with mild CD and 1 subject with moderate CD. The 15–18 year old group was comprised of 2 subjects with mild CD and 3 subjects with moderate CD for the experimental group, while the control group had 3 subjects with mild CD and 2 subjects with moderate CD. The overall intellectual composition of the experimental group was 40 percent with mild CD and 60 percent with moderate CD. The control

group overall composition consisted of 34 percent of the subjects having mild CD, and 66 percent having moderate CD.

**Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of the Subjects**

	Non-S.O. Group (n = 15)	S.O. Group (n = 15)
Average Age (Years)	13.2	13.5
Female (%)	60	54
Male (%)	40	46
Intellectual Cap: Mod (%)	66	60
Intellectual Cap: Mild (%)	34	40
Total number each group	15	15

S.O. = Special Olympics

#### General Recreation

Data analysis of the Special Olympics participation and non-Special Olympics participant group's involvement in general recreation is presented in Tables 2 and 3. At-home and Away-from-home activities were the variables of interest.

**Table 2. Data Regarding General Recreation Participation (At-Home Activities)**

Activity	Non-S.O. Group (n=15)	S.O. Group (n=15)
TV	14	b
Play	11	10
Sega/Computer	5	3
Listen to Music	4	4
Read	3	4
Eat	2	3
Play Basketball	3	0

Table 2 corresponds to question number 9: "What do you like to do most when you are at home?" No statistically significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) between the two study groups in the amounts and the types of community integration was found. ( $X = 2.09$ ,  $p = 12.59$ ).

Table 3. Data Regarding General Recreation Participation (Away-from-Home Activities)

Activity	Non S.O. Group (n-15)	S.O. Group (n-15)
Special Olympics	0	3
Travel	4	7
Play Outside	3	1
Shop	2	6
UW-L	3	9
Visit Relatives	6	3
Ski	1	2
Swim	0	4
Restaurant	4	2
Fish	2	0
Camp	2	2

S.O. = Special Olympics

Table 3 corresponds to question number 11: "What do you like to do most when away from home?" No statistically significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) was found between the study groups ( $X = 15.40$ ,  $p = 16.92$ ).

Both groups had very similar recreation interests along all three age categories. The favorite at-home activities in both groups were playing with family members, friends, or pets; watching TV; eating; and playing with sega or computers. The favorite activities away from home were participating in the University of Wisconsin La Crosse's Motor Development Clinic, traveling, visiting relatives, swimming, and shopping.

### Physical Integration

Data analysis of the Special Olympics participant and non-Special Olympics participant groups' involvement in the types of physical integration is presented in Table 4. Physical integration is assessed with questions related to places the subjects have been in the last 12 months. No statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the two study groups was found concerning amounts and the types of physical integration activities. ( $X = 7.21, p = 19.68$ ). Both groups had similar physical integration interests. The favorite places of frequency between both groups were restaurants, grocery shopping, and the mall.

**Table 4. Data Regarding Physical Integration**

Activity	Non S.O. Group (n=15)	S.O. Group (n=15)
Movie	11	13
Concert/Music	9	9
Sports	4	9
Restaurant	15	15
Bowling	9	15
Park	9	11
Mall	15	13
Grocery Store	15	15
Church	6	8
Sleep Over	1	8
Library	10	12
Special Events	11	12

**S.O. = Special Olympics**

### Social Integration

Data analysis of the Special Olympics participant and non-Special Olympics participant groups' involvement in the types of social integration activities is presented in Table 5. The data presented reflects answers to question number 22: "How often do you do things with other people?" No statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the two study groups in the amounts and the types of social integration activities was found. Both groups had similar social integration interests. ( $X = 1.15, p = 7.81$ ). The favorite social integration activity between both groups was visiting their relatives.

Table 5. Data Regarding Social Integration

Activity	Non-S.O. Group (n=15)	S.O. Group (n=15)
Visiting friends at their home	9	13
Visiting relatives at their home	15	15
Spending enjoyable time with friends	10	12
Spending enjoyable time with neighbors	3	7

S.O. = Special Olympics

### Discussion

Earlier studies by Kleiber et al. (1990) indicated an apparent lack of relationship between involvement in Special Olympics and perceived improvement in community integration. Wilhite and Kleiber (1992) further determined that the relationship between

Special Olympics and community integration varied, depending on cognitive ability level.

Utilizing the same interview techniques developed by Malik et al. (1991), this study sought to examine what role age plays in the relationship between involvement in Special Olympics and perceived community integration. Both the control and experimental groups included individuals with mild to moderate cognitive ability levels. School-aged individuals with severe cognitive disabilities were not included in this study.

The results from this study coincided with earlier studies conducted on older participants in that no relationship was found between involvement in Special Olympics and perceived improvement in community integration. General recreation, physical integration, and social integration items taken from the Malik interview determined the amount of community integration of both the control and experimental groups.

Differences in general recreation habits for both groups were not found to be statistically significant. The favorite at-home activities in both groups were playing with family members, friends, or pets; watching TV; eating; and playing with sega or computers. The favorite activities away from home were participating in the University of Wisconsin La Crosse's Motor Development Clinic, traveling, visiting relatives, swimming, and shopping.

Differences in physical integration habits for both groups were not found to be statistically significant. The places frequented over the last twelve months for both groups were restaurants, grocery shopping, and the mall.

Differences in social integration activities for both groups were not found to be statistically significant. The favorite social integration activity for both groups was visiting their relatives.

A possible reason for lack of difference could be the small sample size used for this study. Considering the total amount of school-aged children participating in Special Olympics events worldwide, the sample size of  $n = 15$  is small, and only very large effects will be detected (Witte, 1993).

However, the lack of statistically significant differences in the amount of community integration between the two groups may suggest that not participating in Special Olympics is as effective, in terms of increasing community integration, as participating in Special Olympics. It was hypothesized that the interaction experienced by the Special Olympics group through participation in traditionally held Special Olympics events would have no bearing on the amount of community integration when compared to a non-Special Olympics group. Both groups were similar in age, gender, and cognitive ability levels. It thus appears that it may be other factors that may dictate the amount of community integration one has, as opposed to the type of program in which they participate.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

Fifteen subjects comprised the experimental group and 15 subjects comprised the control group. Both groups were similar in age, cognitive ability levels, and gender distribution. The Malik et al. (1991) interview was used to measure perceived physical and social community integration. The interview took approximately 30 minutes to administer. The Special Olympics group participated in a supervised year-around Special Olympics program. The criteria used to establish whether a participant was "year-around" or not was that they have participated in a least two state games with a minimum of two events per game attended. The control group did not participate in any Special Olympics games or events. Both groups were from the greater La Crosse area.

#### Conclusions

Conclusions must be carefully considered when interpreting the effects of Special Olympics participation has on community integration among school-aged participants with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities.

1. When analyzing general recreation habits, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups.
2. When analyzing physical integration habits, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups.

3. When analyzing social integration habits, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups.
4. The result of this study suggest that there are no statistically significant differences in the amount of community integration among school-aged participants with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities between the two groups.

### Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for further investigations are made:

1. A similar study examining the level of disability and its effect on community integration among school-aged participants should be conducted.
2. A specific age group should be used to lessen the variation among subjects.
3. A similar study comparing males to females should be conducted.
4. A similar study, including those with severe cognitive disabilities should be conducted.
5. A different set of inventories to measure community integration perceptions should be used.
6. The inventories should be administered four weeks post-Special Olympics event to determine community integration perceptions at that time.
7. Future studies should examine individuals with mild cognitive disabilities who participate in Special Olympics Unified Sports events.
8. A similar study on school-aged individuals using a larger number of subjects should be conducted.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**MALIK, ASHTON-SCHAEFFER,**  
**& KLEIBER'S**  
**INTERVIEW**

**SECTION I – BACKGROUND INFORMATION****FIRST NAME OR RESPONDENT:** \_\_\_\_\_

Questions 1 through 8 may be completed before the interview from records of Special Olympics S.O. personnel, advocacy groups, and caregivers)

 **S.O. Participant** **Non-S.O. Participant**

1. Sex of respondent

2. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ Years

3. Level of Cognitive Disorder (circle appropriate category)      1 = mild

2 = moderate

4. Type(s) of additional disability(ies)

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Special Olympics Program:

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Games attended: Fall \_\_\_ Winter \_\_\_ Spring/Summer \_\_\_

7. Number of Events at S.O. games attended: \_\_\_

8. Length of S.O. participation: \_\_\_

**SECTION II – GENERAL RECREATION AND S.O. PARTICIPATION**

9. What do you most like to do when you are at home?

(After each response ask "Is there anything else you like to do?")

(Give up to 2 prompts)

(After respondent has named activities, ask the following question for each activity named)

a. Who do you do this activity with: (Prompt: do you do this activity alone?

With family? With friends?

b. If activity is skill based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good    2= pretty good    3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know    5= doesn't understand

Activity #1: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Who do you do this activity with: (Prompt: do you do this activity alone?

With family? With friends?

b. If activity is skill based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good    2= pretty good    3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know    5= doesn't understand

Activity #2: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Who do you do this activity with: (Prompt: do you do this activity alone?

With family? With friends?

b. If activity is skill based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good    2= pretty good    3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know    5= doesn't understand

Activity #3: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Who do you do this activity with: (Prompt: do you do this activity alone?  
With family? With friends?)
- b. If activity is skill based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
1= really good    2= pretty good    3= not very good but I like it  
4= unsure/don't know    5= doesn't understand

Activity #4: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Who do you do this activity with: (Prompt: do you do this activity alone?  
With family? With friends?)
- b. If activity is skill based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
1= really good    2= pretty good    3= not very good but I like it  
4= unsure/don't know    5= doesn't understand

10. For S.O. participants ask: Do you feel that participating in Special Olympics helped increase your skill level in those activities? 1= Yes    2= No

11. What do you most like to do away from home? (Prompt - In your free time? After school? On the weekend?)

(After each response ask "Is there anything else you like to do?")

(Give up to 2 prompts)

(After each respondent has named activities, ask the following questions for each activity ?named)

a. Who do you do this activity with? (Prompt – Do you do this activity alone?

With family? With friends?

b. If activity is skilled based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good 2= pretty good 3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know 5= doesn't understand

Activity #1: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Who do you do this activity with? (Prompt – Do you do this activity

alone? With family? With friends?

b. If activity is skilled based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good 2= pretty good 3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know 5= doesn't understand

Activity #2: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Who do you do this activity with? (Prompt – Do you do this activity

alone? With family? With friends?

b. If activity is skilled based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good 2= pretty good 3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know 5= doesn't understand

Activity #3: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Who do you do this activity with? (Prompt – Do you do this activity alone? With family? With friends?)

b. If activity is skilled based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good 2= pretty good 3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know 5= doesn't understand

Activity #4: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Who do you do this activity with? (Prompt – Do you do this activity alone? With family? With friends?)

b. If activity is skilled based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1= really good 2= pretty good 3= not very good but I like it

4= unsure/don't know 5= doesn't understand

12. (16) Do you feel that participation in Special Olympics has helped you go out more often and do things away from home? 1= Yes 2= No

13. (Ask the following question if respondent did not mention television as a favorite activity). How often do you watch television?

- a. Who do you watch television with? (Prompt -- Do you watch television alone? With friends? With family?)

For non-S.O. participants ask: why haven't you participated in S.O. programs? (Prompt -- Are there any other reasons?)

(Give up to 2 prompts) (Circle appropriate number(s)).

1 = lack of prerequisite leisure skills/lack of ability

2 = limited/lack of transportation

3 = lack of money

4 = not enough time

5 = didn't know about other S.O. programs

6 = lack of support/encouragement by significant other

7 = programs of no interest

8 = other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

(If respondent names more than one reason ask which is the most important reason)

\_\_\_\_\_ (go to question #7).

14. For S.O. participants ask: what programs have you gone to?

(After each response ask: "Are there any others?")

(Give up to 2 prompts)

(After respondent has named the programs, ask the following questions for each program named)

- a. What do you like best about this program? (Prompt up to 2 times – What else do you like?)
- b. Is there anything you don't like about this program?
- c. Have you made any new friends at this program?
- d. If activity is skilled based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- 1 = really good    2 = pretty good    3 = not very good, but I like it
- 4 = unsure/don't know    9 = doesn't understand

Program # 1 \_\_\_\_\_

- a.
- b.
- c. 1 = yes    2 = no
- d. 1 = really good    2 = pretty good    3 = not very good, but I like it
- 4 = unsure/don't know    9 = doesn't understand

Program #2 \_\_\_\_\_

- a.

b.

c. 1 = yes    2 = no

d. 1 = really good    2 = pretty good    3 = not very good, but I like it

4 = unsure/don't know    9 = doesn't understand

Program #3 \_\_\_\_\_

a.

b.

c. 1 = yes    2 = no

d. 1 = really good    2 = pretty good    3 = not very good, but I like it

4 = unsure/don't know    9 = doesn't understand

15. (12) For S.O. participants ask: Do you feel that participating in Special Olympics helped increase your skill level in those activities? 1 = yes    2 = no

16. Do you participate in recreation programs at the park district, YMCA, or church?

(Circle the appropriate answer).

1 = yes (go to question #18)

2 = no (go to question #19)

17. What are the names of the programs you attend?

(After each response ask "Are there any others?")

(Give up to 2 prompts)

(After respondent has named the programs, ask the following questions for each program named)

- a. What do you like best about this program? (Prompt up to 2 times – What else do you like?)
- b. Is there anything you don't like about this program?
- c. Have you made any new friends at this program?
- d. If activity is skill based ask: How good are you at \_\_\_\_\_ ?

1 = really good    2 = pretty good    3 = not very good, but I like it

4 = unsure/don't know    9 = doesn't understand

Program #1 \_\_\_\_\_

a.

b.

c.    1 = yes    2 = no

d.    1 = really good    2 = pretty good    3 = not very good, but I like it

4 = unsure/don't know    9 = doesn't understand

Program #2 \_\_\_\_\_

a.

b.

c. 1 = yes      2 = no

d. 1 = really good   2 = pretty good   3 = not very good, but I like it

4 = unsure/don't know      9 = doesn't understand

Program #3 \_\_\_\_\_

a.

b.

c. 1 = yes      2 = no

d. 1 = really good   2 = pretty good   3 = not very good, but I like it

4 = unsure/don't know      9 = doesn't understand

### SECTION III – INTEGRATION

#### a. Physical

I am going to ask you how often you have gone to some places in the past year. (Circle the appropriate number after each question)

	A lot	Some Times	Not very often	Unsure don't know	Doesn't understand
	1	2	3	4	9
<b>18. In the past 12 mos/yr</b>					
<b>have you gone to a</b>					
<b>a. Movie?</b>					
1 = yes      2 = no					
If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
<b>b. Concert, musical?</b>					
1 = yes      2 = no					
If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
<b>c. Sport's event?</b>					
1 = yes      2 = no					
If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
<b>c. restaurant to eat a meal?</b>					
1 = yes      2 = no					
If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
<b>d. bowling alley?</b>					
1 = yes      2 = no					
If yes, how often	1	2	3	4	9

	A lot	Some Times	Not very often	Unsure don't know	Doesn't understand
	1	2	3	4	9

e. park?

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

f. mall to shop?

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

g. grocery store?

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

h. church?

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

i. sleep over?

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

j. library?

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?	1	2	3	4	9
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

A lot	Some Times	Not very often	Unsure don't know	Doesn't understand
1	2	3	4	9

k. special events? (eg. Parades, festivals)

1 = yes      2 = no

If yes, how often?      1      2      3      4      9

19. Are there any other places you go? (Circle the appropriate number)

1 = yes      2 = no

(If yes, ask respondent: Where and how often they have been there in the past twelve months)

	A lot	Some Times	Not very often	Unsure don't know	Doesn't understand
	1	2	3	4	9
Place #1: _____	1	2	3	4	9
Place #2: _____	1	2	3	4	9
Place #3: _____	1	2	3	4	9

20. For S.O. participants ask: Did participating in S.O. have any effect on your going out to these places?

1 = yes      2 = no      3 = unsure/don't know

**Social (Behavioral)**

I am going to ask you some questions about how often you do things with other people. (Circle the appropriate number after each question)

A lot	Some Times	Not very often	Unsure don't know	Doesn't understand
1	2	3	4	9

21. Do you...

a. visit friends at their home?

1 = yes    2 = no

If yes, how often?    1            2            3            4            9

b. visit relatives at their home?

1 = yes    2 = no

If yes, how often?    1            2            3            4            9

c. spend time doing enjoyable

fun things with friends?

1 = yes    2 = no

If yes, how often?    1            2            3            4            9

d. spend time doing enjoyable

fun things with neighbors?

1 = yes    2 = no

If yes, how often?    1            2            3            4            9

23. For S.O. participants ask: Have you met any of these people through participation in S.O.?

1 = yes      2 = no      3 = unsure/don't know

24. (For 15 and older) Do you ever go places where you don't know other people well?

1 = yes      2 = no      3 = unsure/don't know

25. Do you spend most of your free time alone or with other people?

1 = with other people      2 = both      3 = alone

If person answers "other people", ask – tell me about him/her/them. Do they work with you? Do you know them from Special Olympics(or recreation organization)?

1 = yes      2 = no      3 = unsure/don't know

26. For S.O. participants ask: do you feel that participation in S.O. has helped you get

along better with others?      1 = yes      2 = no      3 = unsure/don't know

27. (26.) Do you feel that participating in S.O. has allowed you to go out and meet people?

1 = yes      2 = no      3 = unsure/don't know

---

**Additional Notes:**

NAME OF INTERVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF CO-RECORDER \_\_\_\_\_

DATE CONDUCTED \_\_\_\_\_

AMOUNT OF TIME TO CONDUCT \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**  
**INFORMED CONSENT**  
**FOR CONTROL GROUP**

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANT****University of Wisconsin – La Crosse****La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601****Investigator: Mark J. Mani**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, being of sound mind and over 18 years of age, do hereby consent, authorize and request the person named above to undertake and perform on my child, \_\_\_\_\_, an interview to determine what effects that Special Olympics participation has on community integration among school-aged students. I understand that participation in this study requires that my son/daughter complete a 30 minute, 19 item interview with the investigator. I have been thoroughly briefed about the protocols and testing procedures and completely understand what is expected of my son/daughter. Any question that may have occurred to me or my son/daughter have been answered to my complete satisfaction. I have been fully advised of the nature of this study. I, therefore, voluntarily consent to allow my son/daughter to participate as a subject in this study. My son/daughter and I understand that there are no right or wrong answers, that we do not have to answer a question if we do not want to, that we can stop and take a break, and we may end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. I also understand that I may call Mr. Mark J. Mani at (608) 781—971, or Dr. Patrick DiRocco at (608) 785-8695 if I have any questions about this study.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_