

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Special Olympics International, an organization committed to providing sport opportunities for children and adults with mental retardation, has been a major advocate in promoting competitive experiences for the mentally retarded. Few studies have focused on the effects of participation in competitive athletics on individuals who are mentally retarded. The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-concept of winners, non-winners, and losers after participation in a Special Olympics competitive meet. The study also examined the attitude of mentally retarded participants toward competition and the perceived importance of competing in the event.

The subjects for this investigation were participants from the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet. The study included 95 males and 56

females. Comparisons were made among athletes placing first, second, and last in races at the swim meet. Following competition, subjects were administered a subscale of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (PHSCS) and asked questions relative to attitudes toward competition. A follow-up interview was conducted eight to twelve weeks following the swimming meet to determine the importance of having competed in the Special Olympics State Swimming Meet.

No significant differences in self-concept levels existed among winners, non-winners, and losers immediately following competition. While all three groups expressed positive feelings toward participation in Special Olympics, the last place finishers were slightly more negative about swimming in the race when interviewed immediately following their participation. Also, immediately following the race, more second place finishers preferred to swim when racing other people than did winners and last place finishers.

In a follow-up interview eight to twelve weeks after participation, no significant differences were found among groups regarding their attitude toward competing in the Special Olympics Swim Meet. Also, the perceived importance of the Texas Special Olympics State Swim Meet was not significantly different for winners, non-winners, and losers, as measured by responses to the follow-up interview.

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The Self-Concept and Perceived Importance  
of Athletic Competition of Winners  
and Losers in Special Olympics

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Wm. Lynn Luttrell

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The Self-Concept and Perceived Importance  
of Athletic Competition of Winners  
and Losers in Special Olympics

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, professionals from various disciplines have become more aware of the need for total development of individuals with disabilities. Programming for the disabled has gone beyond the teaching of traditional educational skills in the classroom. Extracurricular activities, such as competitive sports and intramural activities, have become more popular as a part of an individual's total program. With the passages of Public Law 94-142 and Section 504 of Public Law 93-112, students with disabilities are guaranteed equal opportunities to participate in physical education experiences, including intramural activities and sports (Dunn & Fait, 1989, p. 518).

Many programs have emerged to help facilitate the participation of individuals with disabilities in athletic programs. One such program is Special Olympics, initiated by the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation in 1968. "Special Olympics is an

international program of physical fitness, sports training, and competition for mentally retarded children and adults" (Sherrill, 1986, p. 474). The Official Special Olympics Sports Rules (1986) states that the mission of Special Olympics includes opportunities for all mentally retarded children and adults "to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympians, and the community" (p. 1).

One of the goals of Special Olympics is the social development of its participants. In an explanation of the Special Olympics philosophy, Hayden (1985) says, "Our concern is for development of the whole person--physically, mentally, socially, spiritually. We use the medium of sport, but our goals go beyond speed, strength, and skill."

Special Olympics is believed to enhance positively the total development of the individual. In describing and justifying the Special Olympics program, Sherrill (1986) states that "positive successful experiences in sport are believed to contribute to improved self-concept and to carry over into the classroom, the home, and the sheltered workshop" (p. 475). The effort to provide experiences for a positive self-concept

seems to be interwoven into many of the philosophies of those attempting to provide athletic and recreational opportunities for the mentally retarded. Kraus (1983) stated that "since physical development is important . . . to a positive self-concept, it is essential that retarded individuals be given a full opportunity to improve their motor skills and enjoy leisure pursuits" (p. 235). Special Olympics attempts to provide a venue that offers an opportunity for enhancement of the self-concept through physical activity. As stated in the Bylaws of National Special Olympics, Inc. (1985), "The mission of this Corporation . . . is to provide physical fitness, sports training, and athletic competition for mentally retarded individuals." In doing so, Special Olympics may be making some valuable contributions to the development of the self-concept and physical fitness of individuals with mental retardation.

A major emphasis in Special Olympics is on participation in the sport rather than winning the event. The motto of Special Olympics further illustrates the emphasis on effort. As reported by Kalakian and Eichstaedt (1982), "The Special Olympics oath, 'Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt,' symbolizes Special Olympics' emphasis

on participation" (p. 358). One might note, however, that the beginning phrase of the very oath "emphasizing participation," is "Let me win." This possible emphasis on winning, as perceived by the participant, has caused some to criticize athletic competition for the mentally retarded. Orelove, Wehman, and Wood (1982) stated, "Special Olympics has become a highly competitive event. . . . One can question whether the original intent of participation has been lost" (p. 325).

In recent years, many programs which feature competitive activities have been criticized. Ruskin (1978) noted that for too many athletic programs the main emphasis is upon competition, with too much attention given to the winning of events. The inherent nature of competition is a problem for many due to the fact that a "loser" will always emerge. Several authorities (Madsen & Conner, 1973; Fait & Billing, 1974; Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981; Scanlan, 1982) highlight problems with direct competition. Some problems stated are that Special Olympics leads to stress and anxiety, reinforces low self-esteems, and hinders maximum development. The loser is quickly forgotten in American society, but the impact of the loss may have negative effects upon that loser.

Walsh (1975) explained that the usual approach to competition is a "zero-sum approach." In the zero-sum approach, there will always be a winner and a loser, which results in a zero value. Society has usually related the positive aspects of competition to success in an activity. The winner is honored most, receives the most attention and the biggest or best prize, and obtains the most glory. However, one must realize that losers also exist after competition. The impact of losing has usually been overshadowed by the positives attributed to winning.

Regarding competitive activities like those used in Special Olympics, many researchers (Freischlag, 1974; Orelove et al., 1982; Zajonc, 1965) have suggested that changes are needed so as to minimize the negative effects competition may have on the individual. While Special Olympics was never intended to be detrimental to an individual's self-concept or total development, an emphasis on winning may be in contrast to the goals originally established by the organization. A study by Levine and Langness (1983) involving Special Olympics' coaches and their teams indicated that winning, not participation, was the main emphasis of the players. One of the coaches in the study stated, "Our most important goal was to help

these guys feel like real human beings. . . . We wanted to help them win because when they win they really feel good about themselves" (p. 537). This emphasis on winning illustrates the change in philosophy, on the part of some Special Olympics coaches and participants, which has evolved over the past several years.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-concept of winners, non-winners, and losers after participation in a Special Olympics competition. The study examined the attitude of participants with mental retardation toward competition and the perceived importance of competing in the event.

#### Need for the Study

Competition is something that most Americans seem to accept as an integral part of everyday life. Even when individuals try not to compete, some type of competition can be observed in their behavior. With respect to games and athletics, the positive aspects of competition usually overshadow any negative effects of participation. Winning can obviously be a positive outcome of competition. Also, competition allows one's

performance to be measured against others, helps establish criterion levels for oneself, and provides an opportunity for social interaction with individuals having similar interests. Few critique or analyze the events regarding the potential negative aspects of losing, and, furthermore, very few efforts are made to design a competitive format in athletics that truly emphasizes participation rather than winning.

Special Olympics is an organization that has sought to provide quality movement experiences in the form of competition without focusing entirely on the winning of the events. While winning is a goal (by the very nature of competition), the focus for individuals with disabilities should be performing to the best of their abilities. In a competitive race, the goal for the athlete is to be the first participant finished. However, the stated emphasis or point of concentration in Special Olympics is the effort to finish. Hayden (1985) stated, "Our games, even at the international level, give recognition for achievement within the limits of personal potential. It is not who you conquer that is important. It is what you do with what God gave you." In the 1989 Texas Special Olympics Program Guide, an article about the history of Special

Olympics states, "The goal is not to win, but to try, to experience, not to conquer" (p. 4).

While participation is the stated goal, the competitive atmosphere of Special Olympics meets may have an effect on the participants which is in conflict with the stated philosophy. However, the positive atmosphere that generally exists at Special Olympics events may do much to counter any negative experiences with respect to failure or poor performances.

While losers are inevitable in each race, organizers of Special Olympics have made many efforts to assure success for individuals of all ability levels. Special Olympics seeks to equalize the competition with homogeneous groupings of ability levels and by having a number of rules and suggestions for setting up the competition (Hayden, 1985). By having similar ability levels in each heat, an individual's chance of winning an event is much greater. Therefore, the individual is supposedly more positive about participation because the chance for success is much greater. Hayden (1985) summarized this organizational style and indicated the proposed benefits in the following:

One of the most unique and important features of the Special Olympics program is its

ability groups for competition. . . . One of the primary purposes of Special Olympics is to provide an opportunity for success for the athletes. Through this success comes confidence, which will benefit the athlete. They will have an improved sense of self-worth, belonging and accomplishment. This confidence will eventually allow other people to see their abilities not their handicaps. (p. 66)

In addition to ability grouping, the Special Olympics organizers make several other efforts to insure a positive experience for participants. At the conclusion of each heat, a designated person provides positive feedback to the participant and congratulates him/her, regardless of the success of the performance. While the Special Olympics event is structured to resemble other events in corresponding sports, the officials, coaches, spectators, and volunteers are encouraged to do as much as possible to support and help the athletes without actually interfering with their performance. Also, all participants receive some award for participating and finishing an event. Awards range from last place ribbons to "gold" medals. In recent years, some events have attempted to have every

participant's name called out over the public address system after concluding the specific race or heat. Such examples show an effort by organizers of Special Olympics to emphasize the positive aspects of participating and minimize the negative effects losing could have on the individual.

One of the many criticisms of Special Olympics has to do with the very nature of competitive athletics for individuals with mental retardation. Madsen and Conner (1973) have indicated competition itself may be a problem for children with mental retardation due to possible failure. Other researchers (Ames, Ames, & Felker, 1977; Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981) report children with low self-concepts may react to competitive conditions with self-punitive behavior for failure. Past studies (Guthrie, Butler, & Gorlow, 1963; Epstein, 1973) indicate that individuals with disabilities tend to have lower self-concepts and see themselves as having less value. Therefore, some have been critical of any structured attempt to place individuals with mental retardation in an environment which, by its very nature, is competitive. Special Olympics is a unique type of athletic contest. While improvements of Special Olympics events are ongoing, a foundation of information concerning the nature and

impact of the events must first exist in order to make wise decisions. Wright and Cowden (1986) have begun to establish an experimental data base demonstrating the specific values of Special Olympics, but they emphasize the need for continued studies to build the data base. Stoneman and Keilman (1973) have suggested that the reaction of mentally retarded individuals to failure in competitive situations be studied. Such studies should be of particular value to organizers of Special Olympics because of the implications of such studies to the philosophy of the organization itself.

While Special Olympics has been criticized, very few studies have been done with respect to participation in competitive athletics and the actual effect on individuals with mental retardation. Much of the criticism has been in the form of opinion and/or theorized statements based on personal observation or bias. While such articles and critiques should not be disregarded, more empirical studies are needed to accurately establish the effects of athletic competition on participants with mental retardation. Although participation in organized athletic contests is the stated emphasis of Special Olympics, the actual effects of such competition on the individual participant are unknown. An examination of the

literature indicates that very little research has been reported concerning the effects of winning and losing on the Special Olympics participant. Furthermore, little research is available regarding the overall impact of participation in Special Olympics from a sociological perspective.

As a result of efforts to focus on participation in Special Olympics rather than on simply winning the events, participants may leave the competition with a positive self-concept and with excitement about having participated. Therefore, Special Olympics may be just as important to the losers of events as to the winners. However, studies are needed which actually examine the reactions of winners and losers with respect to participation in Special Olympics. Further documentation is needed to objectively analyze claims similar to Songster's (cited in Wright & Cowden, 1986), that Special Olympics competition contributes significantly to the self-concept of the participants. Furthermore, sociological studies are needed to examine the importance of participation for both winners and losers.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined according to their use in this study:

Self-concept is defined as "the mental image one has of oneself" (Webster's, 1974). The term is "one of many relating to self-perception" (Harre' & Lamb, 1983). The self-concept is the result of an ongoing process of interactions between oneself and one's environment. A more descriptive discussion of the self-concept will be contained in Chapter 2.

Competition is defined as a contest between two or more individuals which results in a winner and loser(s).

Winner is defined as the victor in a competitive event. Regarding Special Olympics competition, the victor of each heat in a particular sporting event shall be considered a "winner."

Non-winner is defined in this study as an individual placing second in a race.

Loser is generally defined as any participant in a competitive event other than the "winner." However in this study, all last place participants were referred to as "losers."

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The self-concept has been studied and theoretically analyzed for many years. Yet, consensus with regard to the makeup or development of the self-concept is difficult to find in the literature. In addition to the complexity of the self-concept, research dealing with a mentally retarded population offers a unique challenge. The following review will focus on self-concept from a sociological perspective. The review will include issues which may have a bearing on creating an environment which encourages a positive self-concept for individuals with mental retardation participating in a Special Olympics program.

Self-Concept

The self-concept is still poorly understood (Wylie, 1979). In simple terms, the self-concept is a person's perceptions of oneself (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). However, it becomes more complex as one tries to understand and explain the self-concept relative to how it is developed, how it may change over time, or how it may be affected.

Many authorities (Fitts, 1971; Jersild, 1952; Lauer & Handel, 1983; Mead, 1934; Robertson, 1977; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Wylie, 1979) have stated that the self-concept is developed from one's social interactions during a lifetime. Fitts (1971) claimed the "self-concept is learned by each person through his lifetime experiences with himself, with other people, and with the realities of the external world" (p. 3). Therefore, support is evident for Jersild's (1952) belief that the "self-concept is acquired, it does not exist at birth" (p. 16).

While a process of interactions is the means for developing the self-concept, the interpretation of those interactions helps shape and define an individual's self-concept. Mead (1934) contended that the self, of which the self-concept is a part, is the result of a process of interactions and is developed as one interprets the meaning of those interactions. If the self-concept develops over the course of one's lifetime based on the interpretations of experiences, then the self-concept may be thought of as a dynamic entity rather than something of an extremely stable nature. Shavelson and Bolus (1982) described the self-concept as having a multifaceted nature, with inferences about oneself in general being one facet

which stays fairly stable. However, they indicated that perceptions of self relative to behavior is an area which is situation specific and, as a consequence, less stable.

As one analyzes the relationship between the self-concept and a person's experiences, consideration must be given to the importance of a person's perceptions of his or her experiences. Lauer and Handel (1983) indicate that the understanding of a person's self-concept may depend on an understanding of one's reference groups or definition of the situation. The way a person perceives a situation may affect the interpretation given to the situation, and the group or person with which one identifies may have an effect on the meaning given to an interaction. One's perceptions of environmental interactions are influenced especially by reinforcements, evaluations by significant others, and one's attributions for one's own behavior (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). In fact, relative to the role played by significant others, the "perceived" reactions of others are thought to be more closely correlated to self-concepts than the "actual" reactions of others (Miyamoto & Dornbusch, 1956; Quarantelli & Cooper, 1966). Therefore, reality may

not be as important with regard to the self-concept as the perception of reality.

In early writings, Cooley (1902) described the relationship between society and the self-concept as a looking-glass metaphor. Cooley's "looking-glass self" described society as the looking glass. When a person looks at others, he or she can see and evaluate one's own image. If the image seen or imagined in the social mirror is favorable, the self-concept is enhanced. If the image is unfavorable, the self-concept is diminished. In some cases, an objective standard may exist with which one can make an evaluation of self-worth. However, society still plays a part in the setting of standards, and therefore one still makes self-evaluations based upon the looking-glass concept.

Festinger (1954) noted that objective standards of comparison were often absent within an environment. His social-comparison theory suggested that in the absence of objective standards, people will employ others in their environment as the basis for forming estimates of self-worth. The importance of a reference group then becomes even greater when independent standards of comparison do not exist.

### Self-Concept and the Mentally Retarded

The mentally retarded usually have lower self-concepts when compared to nonhandicapped students. Several researchers (Epstein, 1973; Green & Levitt, 1962; Guthrie, Butler, & Gorlow, 1963; Harvey & Greenway, 1984; Jones, 1985; Kinn, 1962; Pless, Roghmann, & Haggerty, 1972) have reported lower self-concepts for students with disabilities than nonhandicapped students. Jones (1985) indicated that students with disabilities had: significantly more negative self-concepts; higher anxiety levels; more negative perceptions of their intellectual abilities, school status, and popularity; and more emotional feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, guilt, impulsivity, and immaturity than nonhandicapped students. When specifically analyzing mean performance scores of educable mentally retarded students on a self-concept scale, scores were significantly lower compared to nonhandicapped students (Jones, 1985).

Willey and McCandless (1973) reported a contrast to the majority of findings. They indicated that self-concepts tend to be virtually equal when comparing groups of normal and educable mentally retarded (EMR) students. However, their research represents an

overwhelming minority regarding support in the literature for their findings. They explain the discrepancy by stating that the instrument used perhaps was not sensitive enough to accurately obtain the EMR's true feelings of self. Most research studies support the belief that individuals with mental retardation generally have lower self-concepts than their nonhandicapped peers.

Since the self-concept is developed and affected through interactions, the types of interactions one experiences may have an impact on an individual's self-concept. Therefore, if an individual perceives interactions to be positive experiences, then the self-concept would tend to develop or grow in a positive direction. With regard to the current study, a review should include the way the self-concept may be positively enhanced when participating in movement experiences and competitive events.

#### Self-Concept and Movement Experiences

Research has indicated that a relationship exists between the level of one's self-concept and movement experiences, levels of success, and the competitive aspects of certain interactions. Sherrill (1986)

suggested that a dual directionality exists regarding the relationship between the self-concept and movement experiences. She reported that a positive self-concept can enhance one's movement experiences and that positive movement experiences can help create a positive self-concept. When analyzing data of mentally retarded subjects, Loovis (1978) cited evidence which suggests that self-concept and body image can be improved in the mentally retarded as a result of physical activity and/or participation in sports. Roswal, Frith, and Dunleavy (1984) reported a correlation between motor proficiency and self-concept. Their findings indicated the success one experiences in movement activities seems to reflect a more positive image. Simpson and Meaney (1979) reported that positive changes occur in the self-concept as directly related to the degree of success in an activity.

### Special Olympics

The concept of athletic participation for the mentally retarded has had a very positive reception by advocates for the disabled. Several researchers (Brower, 1969; Burton, 1987; Cratty, 1972; Rarick, 1971; Sherrill, 1986) have suggested ways in which

Special Olympics benefits participants. Burton (1987) stated, "Competition in Special Olympics contributes to the physical, social, and psychological development of the athlete" (p. 35).

Regarding the physical benefits for participants, the Special Olympics philosophy and mission are specific about trying to improve the physical ability of athletes with year-long training. In an address to people at a training school for Special Olympics, Hayden (1985) explained some reasons for the existence of Special Olympics which differ from some other athletic organizations:

Our mission is much more than periodic staging of games. Since our concern is personal development, our primary efforts are directed toward sport training--to preparation for the games. The time between the games is at least as important as the games themselves. . . . Our goal is participation year round, every year. The most important activities of Special Olympics occur each day in gymnasiums and pools, on ski slopes and playing fields around the world (p. 17).

Furthermore, according to the Bylaws of National Special Olympics, Inc., the organization:

seeks to accomplish its mission by providing year-round opportunities for physical fitness, sports training, and athletic competition and recreation through local, area, state and regional programs . . . and training programs for lay and professional persons interested in physical and athletic development of mentally retarded persons (p. 32).

While the efforts of those involved with Special Olympics are clearly to enhance the physical development of individuals with mental retardation, some question exists as to significant benefits. In a recent study (Pitetti, Jackson, Stubbs, Campbell, & Saraswathy, 1989), athletes measured before and after an average of 13.3 months of Special Olympics activities did not improve with regard to maximal ventilatory or aerobic capacity. However, the authors concluded that while improvement is not often shown with statistical significance in research studies relative to Special Olympics participants, some improvement may be seen, and the logical assumption would be that participants do benefit from the athletic

training. With regard to results of longitudinal physical fitness testing of Special Olympics participants, Pitetti et al. (1989) stated, "Although not significant, the slight drop in mean percent body fat does suggest that the caloric expenditure of the activities might be sufficient to prevent an increase in body fat" (p. 367).

In addition to any supposed physical benefits for participants, the physical activity may also help in areas related to attitudes or self-concept. Therefore, perhaps Special Olympics exists as much or more for reasons other than physical fitness benefits. From the beginning of Special Olympics, social and psychological benefits have been claimed as goals for participants. Sherrill (1981) has justified Special Olympics participation relative to providing positive successful experiences in sport which are believed to contribute to improved self-concept. Furthermore, she said there is a positive carry-over into other social endeavors and interactions.

At the heart of the Special Olympics philosophy is the goal for individuals with mental retardation to feel better about themselves and gain wider acceptance within society. Part of the mission statement of the Special Olympics Foundation is to provide

"opportunities for the general public to better understand mental retardation, and to promote the expansion of agencies and qualified persons who are dedicated to the service of mentally retarded persons and their families" (Bylaws of National Special Olympics, Inc., 1985, p. 32). Brickey (1984) has indicated one of the goals of Special Olympics is to integrate athletes into community recreation programs. He indicated "positive aspects of Special Olympics include: increased knowledge about training and coaching mentally retarded athletes; and making more recreational facilities in the community available to the mentally retarded" (p. 28-29). Others (Grainger, 1978; Guttman, 1976; Monnazzi, 1982; Shapira, 1974; and Valliant, Bezzubyk, & Daley, 1985) have supported competitive and recreational sports as an effective means of projecting persons with disabilities into the community.

#### Competition and Special Olympics

While evidence indicates that an important aspect of Special Olympics participation is creating an acceptance of individuals with mental retardation within society, perhaps the positive feelings a

participant has about oneself are of primary importance. The way a participant feels about his/her performance and the experience of the competition may have a bearing on Special Olympics as a positive or negative experience. Therefore, competition must be examined relative to the feelings one has about oneself and competing in Special Olympics.

Competition is often reduced to an analysis of the obvious bottom line: winning or losing. However, while Special Olympics results in winning and losing, proponents of the organization maintain that there is more to participation than only winning. Burton (1987) stated, "Competition is more than winning. It is a feeling of doing one's best, an expression of one's ability, a chance to grow, an opportunity for social interaction and to be part of meaningful, enjoyable experiences" (p. 35).

Participation in "meaningful, enjoyable experiences" may indeed have a positive effect on the self-concept of Special Olympics participants. Regarding factors underlying the enjoyment of youth sports, Wankel and Kreisel (1985) indicated that the intrinsic reasons are the most significant to participants. "The most important reasons for playing were: excitement of sport, personal accomplishments,

improving one's skills, testing skills against others, and performing skills" (p. 51). By contrast, the extrinsic reasons were the least important reasons for participating. They were: "pleasing others, winning rewards, and winning the games" (p. 51). The reasons classified as being of intermediate importance were the "social reasons: being with friends, the team, etc." (p. 62).

The structure of competition in Special Olympics is designed to allow for positive attitudes on the part of its participants. Edmiston (1979) stated, "Little concern is given to coming in first in an event or to gaining fame and fortune; rather, the Special Olympian demands only to be allowed to compete over and over again. Winning is not important; only the chance to finish an event matters" (p. 34). Giving recognition to all and allowing for all to play and compete is thought to create positive self-concepts and attitudes in Special Olympians. Schmelzer (1979) acknowledged "first place is not as important as competing; ribbons are given to everyone, and these are reward enough" (p. 19). The process of involving students in physical activities is the goal of the Special Olympics organization (Vodola, 1973).

While a focus on winning is deemphasized and participation and training are primary goals in Special Olympics, the concept of competition in any form for individuals with mental disabilities has been questioned by some. Competition among the nonhandicapped youth in our country has also been questioned. Therefore, when an organization sponsors or administers athletics for adults and youth with mental disabilities, some criticisms have surfaced.

In an effort to help individuals with mental disabilities, the use of competition may inhibit optimal development. Fait and Billing (1974) claimed that direct competition negates maximum development. Madsen and Conner (1973) have expressed concern that mentally retarded children in competitive situations may have a problem dealing with possible failures. Stoneman and Keilman (1973) reported that competition positively affected the performances of individuals with mental retardation, but they suggested that more study was needed regarding failure in competitive situations.

The nature of competition is a concern when working with individuals with low self-concepts, and the mentally retarded population is considered to have a lower self-concept than the nonhandicapped

population. Scanlan (1982) indicated that individuals with either low self-esteem or inexperience in competitive activities may especially have a problem with competition. The trouble is related to the anxiety involved in certain competitive situations. Other studies (Ames, Ames, & Felker, 1977; Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981) support Scanlan with regard to competition involving individuals with a low self-esteem and also report that the attitude one has toward such events affects positive rewards. Children with an already positive attitude toward competition and a higher self-concept receive greater benefits of success and dependence on performance-based assessments as compared to children with low self-concepts (Ames, Ames, & Felker, 1977).

Much of the criticism about competition among youth and individuals with disabilities is simply inclusive of criticisms within our society of competition in general. An effort to focus on cooperative attitudes within our society rather than competitive ones is mentioned repeatedly in the literature, especially with regard to physical activities for youth. Orlick (1978) contends that alienation or social isolation is a serious problem in North American society as a consequence of the

overemphasis on competition, individual success, and assumption of personal responsibility for failure. Perhaps Foster (1984) summarized the cooperation versus competition ideology best:

The pervasive influence of cooperative behavior appears to be significant to the psychosocial development of the person and should be initiated in the early grades to bring about more effective social interaction patterns. One basic problem to overcome in the cooperative framework of games and sports, however, pertains to the win-loss criterion emphasized in contemporary competition. The emphasis on production, performance, and evaluation all relate to the notion of winning which receives a high premium in activities engaged in by children. If a child is trained to be competitive, this may actually produce less cooperative behavior and reduce the child's desire to help others in need (Barnett and Bryan, 1974). A child may even prefer to beat another child than to receive a reward for cooperating (Kagan & Madsen, 1971) (p. 202).

As previously noted, Special Olympics has as part of its mission a desire to create positive attitudes and self-concepts within its participants and, furthermore, to create an opportunity for integration into and acceptance from the society to which a mentally retarded individual belongs. Therefore, much of the questioning of Special Olympics regards its reliance on a medium of competition. The games are designed to model the high levels of competition already seen in other sporting events. In an article highlighting the success and growth of Special Olympics, Dietl (1983) quoted Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the leading force behind Special Olympics. He wrote, "What Eunice Kennedy Shriver does not want is this: 'Let us not be satisfied with a game that looks like soccer; an event that is almost like the high jump; a race that could pass for a 400-meter relay'" (p. 13). She wants the games to be like the sporting events seen in society. Special Olympics is giving individuals with disabilities a chance to do what nonhandicapped individuals have been doing for years.

As the games have become more sophisticated with regard to production, rules, organization, etc., perhaps they have become more important to its participants. In the 1983 Special Olympics

International Games, Shriver (1983) predicted "more than 4300 mentally handicapped athletes . . . from 48 countries, every state in the United States and the U.S. territories will compete in 13 Olympic-type events for the chance to win gold, silver, and bronze medals" (p. 8). Such an event is the ultimate goal of many participants as they compete in events leading up to state or international levels of competition. Johnson (1973) stated, "Competition, like play, progresses through definite and identifiable stages in which the mentally retarded youngster strives to attain a goal that is important to him" (p. 90). Shriver (1983) said, "Athletes at these Games have spent four years in training and competition to win a hard-earned berth on their state or country's International team" (p. 10). As "hard-earned berths" to higher levels of competition become a goal to the participants, perhaps winning rather than participating becomes more important. Orlick (1978) claimed that, as games increasingly become more serious and performance oriented, there is less fun to be derived.

Perhaps Special Olympics, with all its structure and competitiveness, is stressful for some participants. According to Scanlan (1977), a child who finds competitive sport stressful will experience

diminished enjoyment and intrinsic motivation; and, therefore, the child's performance and skill development will be less than optimal. However, can individuals with mental retardation participate and reap positive rewards as either winners or losers? Can participants compete and yet, somehow, operate within a cooperative philosophy within society? Foster (1984) suggested that, in order for one to operate with a cooperative philosophy, a participant's perceptions of the "importance" of winning" must be alleviated with different criteria exchanged relative to acceptance and success. Perhaps Special Olympics is helping its participants to perceive the competitive aspects as less important than other stated goals. Perhaps an individual's feelings of "acceptance and success" are derived in Special Olympics from something other than winning. Perhaps any stress evoked from Special Olympics is overcome by the total experience. Edmiston (1979) stated, "Special Olympics is an example of such a program that may evoke some stress and anxiety in those mentally retarded individuals who participate, and yet the main goal is that the experience be one that is as pleasant and fun-filled for them as is possible" (p. 6).

Perhaps Special Olympics does create an atmosphere for encouragement, cooperation, and positive attitudes and self-concepts among its participants. If so, Special Olympics participation may be instilling qualities in its participants which are needed in the mainstream society. Regarding the structure of sport in North America, Foster (1984) concluded, "With games and sports serving as a microcosm of society, it is imperative to concentrate on those qualities needed by our children and youth that can benefit society, not degrade or deteriorate it. Therefore, our future as a society is largely dependent upon interdependent, cooperative, and harmonious relationships that we hold with one another" (p. 205). Therefore, perhaps Special Olympics, as a microcosm of sports, needs to provide an atmosphere which contributes positively to the feelings participants have about themselves and the feelings society has about the participants. "There are many social and psychological benefits that have been attributed to participation in Special Olympics, but rarely have they been supported by research" (Brickey, 1984, p. 29).

## CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the self-concept and the performance of individuals in Special Olympics competition. The self-concept is an ongoing process of interactions. Many studies seek to measure changes in the self-concept as a result of participation in activities over time. However, the self-concept of an individual may change over time due to any one of a number of social experiences or other variables. Wylie (1961) and Videbeck (1960) have written that self-concept ratings may change either positively or negatively as a result of involvement in particular tasks and the success or failure of the individual in the particular tasks or abilities.

Change over time was not a focus of this study but, rather, the differences among groups of individuals immediately following a success or failure in an athletic event. Rarely have researchers tested for differences in self-concept scores between groups of winners and losers based on single incident performances in an athletic event. Therefore, this study was interested in the differences among groups of performers with different levels of success at an

athletic event, not in changes in individual self-concepts. To determine the immediate feelings one had about oneself relative to competing in a Special Olympics meet, the administration of a self concept scale was done immediately following participation in the event. In doing so, an effort was made to determine the child's self-concept immediately following a win or loss.

#### Population

The subjects for this investigation were participants from the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas. In order to qualify for the state meet, each participant had to have participated in at least one previous swim meet during the summer. Either a local meet or an area/zone meet would be acceptable. The ages of the participants ranged from 12-41 years of age, with a mean age of 22 years. The study included 95 males and 56 females, for a total population of 151.

Each of the subjects was mentally retarded as specified in the eligibility rules of Special Olympics, Inc. As stated in the 1989 Texas Special Olympics Program Guide,

An individual with mental retardation is one who exhibits the following relative to biological age and to the social culture:

- (1) intellectual functioning that is significantly below average, and
- (2) marked impairment in the ability to adapt to the demands of society in which the person lives.

It is now widely agreed that both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior must be shown to be impaired as measured on objective criteria before a person can be identified as being mentally retarded. Neither low intelligence nor impaired adaptive behavior alone is sufficient for this diagnosis (p. 46).

One of any number of recognized tests may be used to determine an individual's level of intelligence, but the most widely used scales are the Stanford-Binet and Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children. Each test yields an Intelligence Quotient (IQ), with mental retardation being classified as scores that fall two standard deviations below the mean. Therefore, scores below 70 are considered within the category of mental retardation (Seaman & DePauw, 1989).

The subjects were selected based on their performance in heats of the meet. The "winners" were those individuals who finished in first place in a race. Others included in the study were those individuals who finished in 2nd place or last place in a race. According to a zero-sum approach to competition, there was only one winner and all others were losers. However, for this study, the "losers" were individuals finishing in last place in a race. The 2nd place finishers were declared as "non-winners," since they did not win but still finished ahead of someone in the race. Second place participants were included in the study to determine if differences existed between the self-concept scores of "non-winners" and last place finishers. The categories of subjects were "winners," made up of first place finishers; "non-winners," as represented by second place finishers; and "losers," made up of last place finishers. The number of subjects in each group was 57 "winners," 47 "non-winners," and 47 "losers." Since participation in the interview following a race was voluntary, not all athletes chose to be interviewed, thus the difference in the number of subjects per group.

### Instrumentation

Much attention has been given to the attempt to measure the self-concept and subsequent development of a suitable measuring instrument. As Wylie (1961) indicated, the majority of self-concept scales have been designed for one study in particular, used only during that study, and then put away with little more attention given to the instrument. This results in most instruments being short-lived and of an unknown quality. This problem is compounded with the mentally retarded, where few instruments specific to this population have been developed. However, Zisfein and Rosen (1974) stated, "Self-concept can be measured meaningfully in the mentally handicapped, and that it varies independently of IQ" (p. 18). The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (PHSCS) was chosen for this study based upon its continued use in many studies since 1964, and its use in several studies involving individuals with mental retardation.

The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale has been reviewed favorably by numerous researchers (Benson & Rentsch, 1988; Bentler, 1972; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Smith & Rogers, 1977; Wylie, 1974b). Since its original development in 1964, the PHSCS has

been used in a number of studies and is one of the most popular self-concept scales used in research. Wylie (1974a) considered it to be the most promising research tool in its field. Bentler (1972), Crandall (1973), and Shreve (1973) have all given positive reviews to the tool's utility in research work.

The PHSCS was partially selected due to its successful use with handicapped subjects. Piers (1969) indicated that self-concepts were successfully measured for children with mental retardation, physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and those with specific health problems. Several studies and reviews (Mayer, 1965; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Shreve, 1973; Piers, 1969; Robinson & Shaver, 1973; Wylie, 1974a) have supported the scale as being one of the most adequate and suitable instruments available to assess both the normal and the mentally retarded child's perception of self.

The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, in its entirety, is made up of eighty declarative statements. The self-report questionnaire is designed to assess how individuals feel about themselves. The subjects respond to each statement with a response of "yes" or "no." Jones (1985) noted that earlier research using the PHSCS indicated no significant differences in

gender, age or grade, race, or socioeconomic status of subjects (Davis, Dokecki, Coleman, Smith, & Wood, 1975; Frith, 1973; Piers, 1977; Ward & Brown, 1972).

Piers (1969) first reported internal consistency coefficients ranging from 0.78 to 0.93; but after several years and more extensive reliability research from a number of studies, internal consistency was reported to range from 0.88 to 0.93 (Piers, 1984). The original reliability coefficients reported by Piers and Harris (1964) for three different groups were 0.72, 0.71, and 0.72. A review by Piers (1984) of a number of studies indicated that test-retest "reliability coefficients ranged from 0.42 (with an interval of 8 months) to 0.96 (with an interval of 3 to 4 weeks)" (p. 53). The mean and median test-retest reliability was 0.73, and all of the results of stability recorded in the manual with intervals between 1 to 2 months yielded coefficients higher than 0.80. Shorter test-retest intervals are generally associated with higher reliability estimates since there is less chance that environmental or developmental changes will affect self-concepts (Piers, 1984).

A number of empirical studies have attempted to determine the validity of the PHSCS. A variety of approaches have been used, including item analysis,

intercorrelations among the scales and items, comparisons of the responses of various criterion groups, and comparing the PHSCS to other scales designed to measure similar constructs (Piers, 1984). The authors attempted to define content validity by defining the universe to be measured as the areas from Jersild's (1952) work about which children reported qualities they liked or disliked about themselves. Then through item analysis, low items were dropped in arriving at the final scale items (Piers, 1984). Validity, as established by teacher and peer ratings of self-concept, had significant correlations from 0.41 to 0.64 at the .01 level. Correlations from comparisons to other self-concept measuring instruments included a correlation of 0.85 with Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1959) and correlations of 0.51 and 0.61 from two samples tested with the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts, 1971). The mean correlation from a group of eleven samples and nine different self-concept scales was 0.54 (Piers, 1984). Based on evidence from both reliability and validity results, the scale was judged to be sufficient for use in research (Bentler, 1972).

Included within the complete scale are six cluster scales. The clusters are: Behavior, Intellectual

Abilities and School Status, Physical Appearance and Attributes, Anxiety, Popularity, and Happiness and Satisfaction. Piers (1984) reported "the cluster scales were derived empirically through extensive factor analysis" (p. 38). She noted the value of using the cluster scores in some cases for identifying areas of relative strength and vulnerability in individuals. Benson and Rentsch (1988) have confirmed factor analysis techniques for the PHSCS and state that in addition to the total score, "scores also can be reported by six cluster scales (factors)" (p. 618). Pickar and Tori (1986) used cluster scores in their research, and Cooley and Ayres (1988) analyzed data on both the total self-concept index and the six cluster scores. "Michael, Smith, and Michael (1975) also attempted to replicate Piers' original factor structure . . . and the results were substantially similar to those obtained by Piers" (Piers, 1984, p. 68).

Due to the desire in this study to determine the level of satisfaction relative to participation in a Special Olympics event, the ten-item cluster scale of "Happiness and Satisfaction" from the PHSCS was used. The use of a smaller cluster scale was also needed due to time constraints at the swim meet. An immediate reaction to participation was the desired goal,

recognizing a responsibility not to slow up the running of the meet or delay any participants who may have been swimming in more than one event. In addition to the ten items in the cluster and because of the nature of the environment relative to testing (a Special Olympics competitive athletic event), two items each from the cluster scales of "Physical Appearance and Attributes" and "Popularity" were added to the questionnaire since they specifically dealt with performance in "games and sports". The total number of PHSCS items used was 14 questions.

Immediately following the administration of the PHSCS, the subjects were also asked the following questions:

1. Did you like swimming in the race, or did you not like it?
2. Did you feel good about the way you swam in the race, or did you feel bad?
3. Would you like to swim in a race like this again, or would you rather not race again?
4. Would you rather swim without racing or race against other people?

These questions were designed to determine the perceived attitude of the individual about competing in the Special Olympics swim meet.

The other instrument used in the study was a follow-up interview with the subjects. The interview was conducted eight to twelve weeks following the swim meet. The follow-up interview consisted of some general questions about highlights in the individual's life during the few months prior to the interview, followed by specific questions about participation in the Special Olympics swim meet (see Appendices). The follow-up interview was designed to determine the perceived importance to the individual of having participated in the Special Olympics swim meet. An underlying assumption was that if the swim meet was a significant event in the child's life, he/she would mention it with positive references during the follow-up interview.

### Procedures

The PHSCS and additional questions were administered to participants in the Texas Special Olympics State Swim Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas. The 11 interviewers had previous experience working with individuals with mental retardation. They also participated in training and pilot testing using the inventory for this study.

The interviewers, all upper-level undergraduate students enrolled in an upper-division course entitled Adapted Physical Education, participated in a training program that included a simulation of a Special Olympics track meet. The subjects for the pilot study were all athletes having previously participated in Special Olympics programs. The interviewers conducted interviews immediately following a subject's participation in a race. The investigator monitored the interview process by observing interviews conducted by the different interviewers. Special care was made to insure agreement between the investigator and interviewers regarding the accuracy of the subjects' responses. The investigator was also available to clarify procedures if an interviewer had any questions during the interview. The pilot testing confirmed that the volunteers were capable of consistently and accurately interviewing the athletes.

During the formal study, the interviewers rotated among winners, non-winners, and losers. This was done to eliminate any potential interviewer bias. The participants finishing first, second, and last place in each race were asked to participate in the interview. Each subject who agreed was immediately brought to the testing area after meet officials had tabulated the

order of finish and presented the awards. The interval of time between completion of the race and initiation of the interview was between 10 and 20 minutes.

The subjects were greeted by a member of the interview staff immediately following the formal presentation of awards. Subjects were escorted to the interview area and introduced to an interviewer. The interviews were conducted in an area adjacent to the swimming pool in an environment free of distractions and isolated from spectators. All interviews were conducted in a one to one setting. The interviewer welcomed the subject and exchanged greetings. The subject was asked for information regarding the name of the head coach, the finishing place and event of the race in which the subject had just participated, and the age of the participant. The interviewer then introduced the interview questions with an explanation that the questions were about "yourself and the race you just swam." The interviewer then began asking the PHSCS questions.

The original design of the PHSCS was adapted to read the questions aloud to subjects, thus eliciting a "yes" or "no" oral answer from the subjects. This adaptation was recommended by Piers and Harris (1969). Edmiston (1979) noted "such an adaptation leads the

PHSCS to be used with the mentally retarded" (p. 28). Other researchers have used the PHSCS by reading the questions aloud to the subjects (Coleman, 1983; Jones, 1985). In accordance to Piers' suggestion, the statements were changed so as to read correctly when administered orally (i.e., "I am a happy person" was changed to "Are you a happy person?"). The subject was instructed to answer the PHSCS questions with a "yes" or "no." The PHSCS was then administered and the answers were marked on an individual response sheet (see Appendices).

The questions following the PHSCS were presented to each of the subjects using a double-mix method. Each question asked the subject to choose between a positive or negative response. For all subjects, the positive option was stated first on two of the questions and the negative option stated first for the other two questions. The 2 X 2 pairing of questions with the positive and negative options stated first was reversed in order for one-half of the subjects.

The follow-up interview was conducted by telephone eight to twelve weeks following the swim meet. All follow-up interviews were conducted by the investigator. The follow-up interview was conducted with the same subjects interviewed at the swim meet.

However, due to a number of reasons relative to attrition, 43 subjects were not contacted for the follow-up interview. The number included in the follow-up interview was 98 of the original 141 subjects (69.5%). The number of subjects for each group in the follow-up interview was 35 of the original 53 "winners" (66.0%), 32 of the original 42 "non-winners" (76.2%), and 31 of the original 46 "losers" (67.4%). The questions were asked as listed. However, probing with a particular line of questioning was done with respect to certain answers. The probe of follow-up questions were used to clarify or provide more details regarding particular answers. For example, probes included questions involving "why" or "why not" as a follow-up to a statement by the subject or explanations regarding answers like, "The other team said mean things to me." Probes were used as responses by the interviewer to statements by the subject rather than prompts by the interviewer to get particular answers.

#### Delimitations

This study measured the self-concept of the subject immediately following participation in a race at the Texas Special Olympics State Swim Meet. The

self-concept is an ongoing process of interactions and may change over time. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the self-concept measure was analyzed only with respect to the responses given immediately following the win or loss. The self-concept was measured by the administration of an abbreviated version of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale.

The subjects were selected from the total number of participants at the Texas Special Olympics State Swim Meet according to the place they finished in each individual race at the meet. The subjects used in this study were those placing first, second, or last in each race at the meet. However, some subjects participated in more than one event. With such an occurrence, only the raw data gathered after the subject's first race was included and analyzed. If an individual placed first, second, or last in two or more races, the secondary interview results were used only in an effort to detect differences among the groups classified as "repeat interviewees." Individuals repeating the interview process were classified as "ultimate winners" if they won the races prior to being interviewed, as "mixed" if they had won and lost races prior to interviews, and as "ultimate losers" if they had lost all of the races prior to being interviewed. All

subjects had competed in previous swim meets at the local or area/zone level, but this study used subjects only with respect to their performance at the state swim meet.

The "Follow-up Interview" was conducted eight to twelve weeks following the swim meet. Several variables over time may have contributed to a subject's spontaneous recall of the swim meet. For example, if the subject recalled other "significant" events that may have happened following the swim meet, the likelihood of spontaneously recalling the swim meet would be reduced. The twelfth week after the swim meet was immediately prior to Thanksgiving. Therefore, the duration of time between the swim meet and "Follow-up Interview" was limited to twelve weeks. The follow-up population consisted of those subjects initially interviewed at the state swim meet, i.e., those having placed first, second, or last in one of the races.

#### Limitations

One of the limitations of the study is that some subjects may have participated in more Special Olympics sport programs than just swimming. Therefore, in administering the "Follow-up Interview" eight to twelve

weeks following the swim meet, some subjects may have recalled other Special Olympics events in which participation was current and, therefore, seemingly more important at the time. The duration of any effect of perceived importance was unknown and a limitation in this study.

The study was also limited by the number of males and females in attendance at the state meet. More males than females participated in the meet, and the number of male subjects was consequently higher than the number of females.

Another potential limitation was the socioeconomic status of the participants. Since the swim meet was attended by those who could afford to travel to the site, it is reasonable to expect that the participants may be of an above-average socioeconomic status. The effect of socioeconomic status with regard to results was not considered in this study.

### Scoring

The scoring of the raw data for the PHSCS consisted of assigning one point on each item for a response indicating a positive self-concept and zero points for each item response indicating a negative

self-concept. Therefore, a maximum positive self-concept score of fourteen points was attainable. The score represented a level of self-concept as measured immediately following a race in the swim meet.

The four interview questions, which were asked immediately following the PHSCS, were analyzed individually. For each question, a response of the positive option was considered as indicating a positive attitude toward participation in the competition, while the choice of the negative option indicated a negative attitude toward participation.

The "Follow-up Interview" was scored by two different methods of analysis. The first score consisted of counting the number of participants in each category of subjects (first, second, and last place) who spontaneously mentioned participation in the Special Olympics Swim Meet during the first three questions of the interview. The percentage of subjects who spontaneously recalled participating in the swim meet was recorded for each of the finishing place categories and analyzed to determine if significant differences existed among the groups.

The second score consisted of tabulated counts for similar responses for each of the questions in the last half of the follow-up interview. The counts were

grouped as responses from first, second, and last place finishers. Also, a comparison was made between the responses from the follow-up interview to corresponding questions on the interview given at the time of the swim meet. Questions #6 and #7 of the "Follow-up Interview" correspond to question #1 of the first inventory, and questions #8, #9, and #10 of the "Follow-up Interview" correspond to questions #2, #3, and #4 of the first inventory (see Appendices).

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were investigated:

1. There is no significant difference in self-concept scores among winners, non-winners, and losers.
2. There is no significant difference in attitude toward competition among winners, non-winners, and losers.
3. There is no significant difference among winners, non-winners, and losers regarding the perceived importance of participation in Special Olympics.

### Treatment of Data

The data collected in this study were statistically treated using two different methods of analysis. The self-concept scores were analyzed using one statistical tool, while the answers to interview questions were analyzed by a different method. This approach was necessary since the data for the self-concept scale were interval in nature and the answers to the interview questions were considered nominal data.

The data from the PHSCS were treated using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if mean scores from the self-concept scale were significantly different among groups of participants. The dependent variable was the mean score from the self-concept scale for each of the three groups of participants, grouped according to their first, second, or last place finish in the swimming race. The F-ratio from the ANOVA test was determined by the formula:

$$F = \frac{\text{MS treatment}}{\text{MS error}}$$

The significant difference for the ANOVA test was determined and the hypothesis accepted or rejected at the .10 level.

For each of the interview questions, the data were analyzed using the Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) Test. Chi square allows one to determine if the number of individuals answering each question in a similar way is significantly different among first, second, and the last place finishers. The formula used to determine  $\chi^2$  is as follows:

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(\text{Observed} - \text{Expected Values})^2}{\text{Expected Value}}$$

For the  $\chi^2$  tests, the significant difference was determined and the hypothesis accepted or rejected at the .05 level.

CHAPTER IV  
ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-concept of winners and losers during a Special Olympics competition and to examine the mentally retarded participants' attitudes toward and importance of competing in the event. The presentation of data will be divided into three sections. The first section will present results of the self-concept survey. In the second section, information regarding the perceived attitude toward Special Olympics competition will be discussed, and the third section will provide information concerning the perceived importance of competing in Special Olympics.

Analysis of Self-Concept Data

The self-concept data were collected using a cluster scale from the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (PHSCS). To determine the feelings about oneself relative to the level of happiness or satisfaction experienced at the conclusion of competition, the cluster scale of "Happiness and Satisfaction" was used. In addition, four items from two other subscales from the PHSCS which specifically dealt with participation in games and sporting activities were included. The

total number of points one could score on the self-concept instrument was fourteen, with a higher score representing a more positive self-concept.

Although 151 subjects were interviewed after competing in a race, the results from 10 participants were omitted from the sample. The omissions were due to a variety of reasons (e.g., the subject did not respond to or understand the questions; the subject answered all questions in the affirmative or negative, indicating an inability to consistently respond to "lie factor" questions; and/or the subjects did not answer the complete survey). After each interview, the interviewers recorded any concerns or comments about the subject's participation during the survey, and then all data were reviewed and any decision to omit a subject was made by the investigator. Thus, the final number included in the study was 141 participants.

#### Analysis of Self-Concept Data from Initial Interviews

Several individuals were interviewed more than once due to their participation in more than one event. However, only the data collected at the initial interview were included in the self-concept analysis. The number of "repeat" interviews excluded from this portion of the self-concept data analysis was 50.

Table 1 shows the total number of interviews conducted and the exclusions for each of the three categories of participants. Regarding the interviews excluded from the total sample, "repeats" refer to any interviews of individuals other than their first interview following a race, and "omissions" refer to interviews which were excluded by the investigator due to problems in the subject's ability to respond to the questions.

Table 1  
Number of Interview Participants

Group	Number of Interviews			Final
	Original	Repeats	Omissions	
Winners	72	15	4	53
Non-winners	65	18	5	42
Losers	64	17	1	46
TOTALS	201	50	10	141

The number of males interviewed in this study was 88, while the number of females interviewed was 53. The number of males and females within each group of interviewees is shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
Number of Male and Female Interviewees

Group	Males		Females	
	Number	%	Number	%
Winners	30	21.3	23	16.3
Non-winners	26	18.4	16	11.4
Losers	32	22.7	14	9.9
TOTALS	88	62.4	53	37.6

The analysis of self-concept scores showed no significant difference among group means of winners, non-winners, and losers after participating in a Special Olympics swimming event at the state level. The mean score for winners was 11.55, while the mean scores for non-winners and losers were 11.62 and 11.54, respectively. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, as reported in Table 3, showed that the obtained  $F$  of .03 was nonsignificant.

Table 3  
ANOVA Table of Self-Concept Scores  
of Initial Interview Participants

Source of Variation	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Between Groups	2	0.16	0.08	0.03
Within Groups	138	406.45	2.95	
Total	140	406.61		

(F of 2.35 required for significance at the .10 level)

In addition to analyzing the self-concept mean scores of the groups of winners, non-winners, and losers, a two-way ANOVA was conducted using self-concept mean scores of males and females for each of the three groups. The mean scores for each category are shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
 Mean Self-Concept Scores of Initial  
 Interview Participants by Gender and Place

Group	Place			$\bar{X}$
	First	Second	Last	
Male	11.57	11.96	11.56	11.697
Female	11.35	11.06	11.50	11.303

As shown in Table 5, there was no significant difference among any of the groups at the .10 level. Additionally, the interaction source of variation was not significant.

Table 5  
ANOVA Table of Initial Interview  
Self-Concept Scores of Male and  
Female Participants by Place

Source of Variation	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Place	2	0.52	0.26	0.08*
Gender	1	4.77	4.77	1.51 <sup>+</sup>
Interaction	2	3.90	1.95	0.62*
Error	135	425.25	3.15	
Total	140	434.44		

\*F of 2.35 required for significance at the .10 level

<sup>+</sup>F of 2.75 required for significance at the .10 level

#### Analysis of Self-Concept Data from Repeat Interviews

Although this study was limited to self-concept data collected from the subjects interviewed during their first visit to the interview area, several subjects participated in more than one event. Therefore, since the process for data collection was to interview participants placing first, second, or last in a race, several athletes repeated the interview process. In fact, some of the participants were

interviewed three times. While the data from repeat interviews were excluded from the primary analysis relative to self-concept scores, the repeat groups' mean scores were analyzed to see if any differences existed among those participants having placed first, second, or last in more than one event.

For the purpose of data analysis, those interviewed more than once were divided into groups as defined below:

Ultimate winner -- an athlete having placed first in each race prior to being interviewed.

Winner/non-winner -- an athlete having placed first in at least one race and second in another race(s) prior to being interviewed.

Winner/loser -- an athlete having placed first in at least one race and last in another race(s) prior to being interviewed.

Non-winner -- an athlete having placed second in each race prior to being interviewed.

Non-winner/loser -- an athlete having placed second in at least one race and last in another race(s) prior to being interviewed.

Ultimate loser -- an athlete having placed last in each race prior to being interviewed.

Forty-two individuals were interviewed more than once at the swim meet. Eight of these were interviewed three times, thus yielding a total of 92 scores collected from "repeat interviewees." Of the 92 scores, 15 scores were omitted due to inadequate responses during the interview. One person, interviewed three times, was omitted since he was the only participant in the meet having placed first, second, and last in three races and, therefore, the only athlete in his category. The final number of self-concept scores included in this analysis was 74. The 74 scores came from 36 participants who were interviewed more than once. Table 6 shows the number of people interviewed more than once and the number of self-concept scores for each of the repeat interview categories used in the ANOVA test.

Table 6  
Number of Repeat Interviewees

Group	Number in each Category	
	Athletes	Interviews
Ultimate Winner	4	9
Winner/non-winners	7	14
Winner/losers	10	20
Non-winners	5	10
Non-winner/losers	8	17
Ultimate Losers	2	4

Relative to mean self-concept scores, the results from the ANOVA test indicated no significant differences among groups of those participants interviewed more than once at the swim meet. As shown in Table 7, no significant difference existed at the .10 level of significance.

Table 7  
ANOVA Table of Self-Concept Scores  
of Repeat Interview Participants

Source of Variation	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Between Groups	5	14.69	2.94	1.30
Within Groups	68	153.47	2.26	
Total	73	168.16		

F of 1.95 needed for significance at the .10 level

Analysis of Data Relative to  
Perceived Attitude Toward Competition

Data relative to the perceived attitude of athletes toward competition were collected from answers to questions which followed the self-concept questions. The participants were given two choices and asked to respond orally. One choice was a positive response toward competition, while the other choice was a negative response toward competition.

The analysis of these data will be presented in two parts. The first section will present data collected at the swim meet. The second section will

present the data collected during the follow-up interview which included the same questions as the initial interview.

#### Analysis of Initial Interview Questions

Each of the four questions following the self-concept survey will be discussed separately. Following the PHSCS questions, the first question asked of the participants focused on their like or dislike for swimming in the race. Table 8 shows the number of responses by groups to Question #1 relative to the positive and negative responses to the question.

Table 8  
Observed and Expected Frequencies  
for Question #1, "Did you like  
swimming in the race or did you not like it?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	57	55.10	0	1.90	6.067*
Non-winners	45	44.47	1	1.53	
Losers	43	45.43	4	1.57	

<sup>^</sup> The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Did you not like swimming in the race or did you like it?").

<sup>+</sup> fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies

\* Significant at .05 level

As indicated in Table 8, a significant Chi square (.05 level) was obtained, with the "losers" liking to race in the swim meet less than the "winners and non-winners."

The second question asked of participants was relative to their feelings about their performance in the race. They indicated whether they "felt good" or

"felt bad" about the way they raced. Table 9 shows the observed and expected frequencies of responses by groups of performers. The Chi square was not significant at the .05 level for Question #2.

Table 9  
Observed and Expected Frequencies  
for Question #2, "Did you feel good about  
the way you swam in the race or did you feel bad?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	
Winners	56	52.41	1	4.59	5.032
Non-winners	40	41.38	5	3.62	
Losers	41	43.21	6	3.79	

<sup>^</sup>The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Did you feel bad about the way you swam in the race or did you feel good?").

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 required for significance at the .05 level

Question #3 asked the participants to indicate if they would like to swim in a race like the one they had

just completed or would they rather not race again. As indicated in Table 10, there was no significant difference among groups relative to their desire to race again.

Table 10

## Observed and Expected Frequencies

for Question #3, "Would you like to swim in a race like this again or would you rather not race again?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	55	53.96	2	3.04	0.607
Non-winners	43	43.55	3	2.45	
Losers	44	44.49	3	2.51	

<sup>^</sup> The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Would you rather not swim in a race like this again or would you like to race again?").

<sup>+</sup> fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

The last question the participants answered following the completion of their race was, "Would you

rather race against other people or swim without racing?" Table 11 indicates the observed and expected frequencies of responses by groups relative to their positive or negative desire to race when swimming.

Table 11  
Observed and Expected Frequencies  
for Question #4, "Would you rather race  
against other people or swim without racing?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	51	50.16	6	6.84	6.498 <sup>*</sup>
Non-winners	44	40.48	2	5.52	
Losers	37	41.36	10	5.64	

<sup>^</sup> The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Would you rather swim without racing or race against other people?").

<sup>+</sup> fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies

<sup>\*</sup> Significant at .05 level

The null hypothesis of no difference among groups was rejected for Question #4. There was a difference

among groups relative to the responses for Question #4. The group of "non-winners" were more positive of their desire to race others, and losers a desire to swim without racing.

#### Analysis of Follow-up Interview Questions

The follow-up interview consisted of some initial questions to determine if the participant spontaneously recalled participating at the swim meet. After questioning the subject to assess his/her recall of the Texas Special Olympics (TSO) State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas, the participant was asked the same questions as the Initial Interview Questions 1-4.

The first set of questions in the follow-up interview allowed the subject to mention important or enjoyable things that he/she had done during the recent past. If participation in the TSO State Swimming Meet was mentioned spontaneously, then a recording of a positive response was made. If no mention of the swim meet was made during the first portion of the interview, then a record of a negative spontaneous recall was noted.

Follow-up interviews were conducted eight to twelve weeks following the TSO State Swimming Meet. In the follow-up interviews, 98 of the original 141

subjects participated. Table 12 shows the responses relative to spontaneity in recalling the TSO State Swimming Meet as an important event for the subject.

Table 12  
Observed and Expected Frequencies for  
Spontaneously Recalling Swim Meet Participation

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Recall		No Recall		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	17	13.93	18	21.07	1.931
Non-winners	12	12.73	20	19.27	
Losers	10	12.34	21	18.66	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

As indicated by Table 12, the Chi square value was not statistically significant relative to spontaneity of recall regarding participation in the TSO State Swimming Meet. Thus, after a period of 8-12 weeks, there was no significant difference among groups as to the perceived importance of competing in the swim meet.

In response to the first set of follow-up interview questions, several subjects mentioned "swimming" as one of the activities they enjoyed, although they did not specify the TSO State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth. These responses were credited as "no recall" responses for the analysis shown in Table 12. However, an analysis was also done combining the generic "swimming" responses with the swimming responses in which the TSO State Swimming Meet was specifically mentioned. Table 13 shows the responses for the groups where swimming (of any type) was mentioned as an activity enjoyed by the interviewee. Even with the inclusion of the generic "swimming" response, there was no significant difference among groups relative to the perceived importance of swimming activities.

Table 13  
Observed and Expected Frequencies for  
Spontaneously Recalling Swimming Activities

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Recall		No Recall		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	25	22.86	10	12.14	1.298
Non-winners	21	20.90	11	11.10	
Losers	18	20.24	13	10.76	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

Questions 6-10 of the follow-up interview were questions which were asked in the initial interview. Question #1 of the initial interview was, "Did you like swimming in the race or did you not like it?" However, in the follow-up interview Question #6 was, "What did you like about swimming in the Special Olympics?" Question #7 read, "What did you not like about swimming in the Special Olympics?" The responses for these two questions were tallied and categorized. Almost all of

the responses fell into one of four categories. The categories were:

1. Aspects related to "Racing and Competition."  
(Included the awards, performances in the races, getting to exercise, TSO Opening Ceremonies, etc.)
2. Aspects related to the "Trip and Recreation."  
(Included traveling, the hotel, the dance, eating out, parties, attending the Texas Rangers baseball game, etc.)
3. Aspects related to the "Social Atmosphere."  
(Included interactions with friends, opponents, workers, the crowd, teammates, parents, supervisors, etc.)
4. Aspects related to the "Facilities and Environment."

The data were analyzed using Chi square to determine if the positive and negative responses for groups of participants were significantly different.

Most of the responses from Questions #6 and #7 related to "Racing and Competition." For this category, 80 comments were made, with 61 being positive and 19 being negative. Table 14 shows the responses

for the comments regarding racing and competing in the TSO State Swimming Meet.

Table 14  
Observed and Expected Frequencies for  
Comments Relative to Racing and Competition

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	22	21.35	6	6.65	1.837
Non-winners	23	21.35	5	6.65	
Losers	16	18.30	8	5.70	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

As indicated by Table 14, there was no significant difference among the three groups regarding positive and negative aspects about racing and competing in the swimming events.

The "Trip and Recreation" category had 32 comments from the subjects. Table 15 indicates the responses for this category. As demonstrated below, the

differences in responses for the groups were not significant.

Table 15  
Observed and Expected Frequencies for  
Comments Relative to the Trip and Recreation

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	11	11.38	2	1.63	0.854
Non-winners	5	4.38	0	0.63	
Losers	12	12.25	2	1.75	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

The comments relative to the "Social Atmosphere" numbered 30 total responses. There was no significant difference among groups relative to the comments about interactions at the swim meet. Table 16 shows the number of responses for the "Social Atmosphere" category.

Table 16  
Observed and Expected Frequencies for  
Comments Relative to the Social Atmosphere

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	10	9.97	3	3.03	0.050
Non-winners	9	9.20	3	2.80	
Losers	4	3.83	1	1.17	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

The last category of responses was with regard to the "Facilities and Environment" at the swim meet. The comments totaled 18, and no significant differences existed among winners, non-winners, and losers. Table 17 indicates the number of responses for each group relative to "Facilities and Environment."

Table 17  
Observed and Expected Frequencies for Comments  
Relative to the Facilities and Environment

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	5	5.00	1	1.00	1.1667
Non-winners	5	4.17	0	0.83	
Losers	5	5.83	2	1.17	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

Almost all of the subjects responded with a positive response when asked what they liked about the swim meet. Only one participant failed to mention anything good about the swim meet. However, when participants were asked what they did not like about the meet, 62 of 63 participants said there was nothing that they did not like. Table 18 shows the number of participants indicating if there was nothing they liked or disliked about the TSO State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas. A Chi square test was performed to

determine if those participants having nothing good or bad to say about the experience was significantly different. As indicated in Table 18, there was no significant difference among groups.

Table 18

Observed and Expected Frequencies for Comments  
Relative to Liking or Disliking Nothing at the Meet

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Disliked Nothing		Liked Nothing		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	23	22.63	0	0.37	1.8937
Non-winners	21	21.65	1	0.35	
Losers	18	17.71	0	0.29	

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

Question #8 of the follow-up interview was the same question as Question #2 of the initial interview. The question, "Did you feel good about the way you swam in the race, or did you feel bad?" was asked of the 98 persons contacted in the follow-up interview. As

indicated by Table 19, the groups responded favorably about the way they swam in the race, and there was no significant difference in the way the three groups felt about their performances.

Table 19

Observed and Expected Frequencies  
for Question #8, "Did you feel good about  
the way you swam in the race or did you feel bad?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	37	33.83	2	5.17	4.087
Non-winners	26	26.89	5	4.11	
Losers	22	24.29	6	3.71	

<sup>^</sup>The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Did you feel bad about the way you swam in the race or did you feel good?").

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 required for significance at the .05 level

Question #9 of the follow-up interview was, "Would you like to swim in a race like this again, or would

you rather not race again?" Of the 98 subjects, three responses were omitted due to inappropriate answers. One subject could not decide, one subject did not respond, and one subject answered "yes" to both parts of the question. Therefore, 95 responses were included in the analysis for Question #9. There was no significant difference among the three groups relative to wanting to race again or not race again. Table 20 shows the responses for Question #9.

Table 20

Observed and Expected Frequencies  
 for Question #9, "Would you like to swim in a race  
 like this again or would you rather not race again?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	37	36.54	2	2.46	1.365
Non-winners	25	26.23	3	1.77	
Losers	27	26.23	1	1.77	

<sup>^</sup>The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Would you rather not swim in a race like this again or would you like to race again?").

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

Table 21 indicates the responses for Question #10 of the follow-up interview. Question #4 of the initial interview was the same as Question #10 of the follow-up interview. The question read, "Would you rather swim without racing or race against other people?" Question #4 of the initial interview was significantly different relative to the responses by the groups of subjects;

however, in the follow-up interview, there was no significant difference among groups relative to their responses regarding swimming with or without racing.

Table 21  
Observed and Expected Frequencies  
for Question #10, "Would you rather race  
against other people or swim without racing?"<sup>^</sup>

Group	Type of Response				$\chi^2(2df)$
	Positive		Negative		
	fo	fe <sup>+</sup>	fo	fe	
Winners	35	34.77	3	3.23	1.641
Non-winners	26	27.45	4	2.55	
Losers	25	23.79	1	2.21	

<sup>^</sup>The positive and negative option was presented conversely for one-half of the subjects (i.e., "Would you rather swim without racing or race against other people?").

<sup>+</sup>fo = Observed frequencies; fe = Expected frequencies  
 $\chi^2$  of 5.991 needed for significance at the .05 level

The total number of responses included in the analysis for Question #10 was 94, with 4 responses omitted. All four responses omitted were due to the

subjects answering "both" when asked whether they would rather swim with or without racing.

### Summary

The analysis of data followed the procedures described in Chapter 3. The self-concept scale was analyzed using an analysis of variance, with an Alpha level of .10. All other information, gathered as a result of subsequent questioning, was analyzed using the Chi Square Test. For the Chi Square Tests, differences among groups were determined at the .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis of no difference among groups was used in this study.

Regarding self-concept scores obtained immediately following a performance at the swim meet, the null hypothesis was retained. No significant difference could be determined among winners, non-winners, and losers at the Special Olympics Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas. Furthermore, no significant difference in self-concept scores was found among groups relative to gender or repeat winners and losers.

The data obtained from the initial and follow-up interviews following the swim meet provided mixed results relative to the null hypothesis. The questions

were asked to determine whether the groups of winners, non-winners, and losers had positive or negative feelings toward competition. While the overwhelming majority of participants answered each question positively, Questions #1 and #4 of the Initial Interview showed a significant difference among winners, non-winners, and losers.

Question #1 asked if the subjects liked or disliked racing in the swim meet. The "losers" liked racing in the swim meet less than the "winners and non-winners." While there was a statistical difference as shown by the Chi Square Test, it must be noted that the number of responding negatively to Question #1 was very small. As a result of the small sample size of negative responses, the expected frequencies in the  $\chi^2$  test were smaller than would be needed to make strong conclusions based on the results of this question. Cramer's Phi Prime is a measure of association which indicates the strength of association relative to the above types of results. For Question #1, Cramer's Phi Prime was 0.2011, which indicates that although there was a significant difference among groups, the strength of the statistical difference was minimal.

Based on the results from Question #4 of the first interview, the null hypothesis was rejected. A significant difference among groups was indicated with regard to whether or not they would rather swim with or without racing other people. Fewer "non-winners" than "winners or losers" wanted to swim without racing. However, on the follow-up interview this observation was not supported. Although the number of subjects interviewed during the follow-up was less than the first sample, the analysis of data indicated no significant difference among groups with regard to wanting to swim with or without racing other people.

The results from every question other than Questions #1 and #4 of the Initial Interview indicated no significant difference among groups with regard to attitude toward competition of winners, non-winners, and losers. Therefore, for each of these questions, the null hypothesis was retained.

The third hypothesis of no significant difference among winners, non-winners, and losers regarding the perceived importance of Special Olympics participation was tested by measuring the number of participants in each group spontaneously recalling the State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas. The first few questions in

the follow-up interview were designed to allow the subject an opportunity to mention their participation in the event at Ft. Worth. Based on spontaneity of recall, there was no significant difference among the number of winners, non-winners, or losers mentioning participation in the TSO State Swimming Meet.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. Based on the results of this study, there was no significant difference regarding the perceived importance of Special Olympics participation for winners, non-winners, and losers.

### Discussion

The results of the self-concept study did not produce significant differences among groups of participants. Comparisons were made among groups relative to the position placed in the race, relative to gender, and relative to those winning and/or losing more than once at the swim meet. Therefore, Special Olympics seems to be an event, although competitive, accomplishes the task of providing a positive experience for participants without producing negative feelings of self-worth as a result of not winning the race. In fact, if feelings of accomplishment as a

result of positive experiences in sport contribute to an improved self-concept, as Sherrill (1986) contends, then the results of the self-concept portion of this study do nothing to refute her contention. Regardless of the finishing position in a race, no significant differences among winners, non-winners, and losers were found.

Of the four questions asked following the self-concept portion of the study, data from two questions indicated significant differences among groups of participants. Results from the first question indicated that more "losers" expressed a dislike for the race than did the groups of "winners and non-winners." The statistical conclusion for this question is weak due to the extremely small number for some of the cells. Therefore, considering the small sample size of negative responses from Question #1, participation in a Special Olympics swim meet may be viewed as an experience enjoyed by an overwhelming majority of the participants regardless of the finishing position in a race.

Question #4 was the second question where a significant difference among groups was found. Subjects were asked if they wanted to swim without

racing or race against other people when swimming. A statistical difference indicated that, immediately following the race, the "non-winners" in races felt more strongly than the "winners and losers" about wanting to race against other people when swimming.

Eight to twelve weeks after the swim meet, subjects were asked again if they wanted to swim without racing or race against other people when swimming, and there was no significant difference among groups. Therefore, the desire to race when swimming was not as strong for the groups of "winners and losers" immediately following the race as it was for the "non-winners." However, after a period of time had passed, "winners and losers" were more inclined to be positive about their desire to race in a swim meet. Conversely, the number of "non-winners" expressing a desire to swim without racing had increased.

Other results from the interviews indicated no significant difference among groups regarding the way they felt about their performance or their desire to swim again in races if given the opportunity. Winners, non-winners, and losers of races had positive feelings about the way they performed. Therefore, it would appear that Special Olympics, at least a particular

state Special Olympics swim meet, is providing an environment of competition in which participants, regardless of their place of finish, want to continue to participate.

Based on the results of this study, Special Olympics competition was a positive experience for participants regardless of the finishing position in a race. No significant difference among groups was found regarding the importance of participating in Special Olympics, and participants indicated a desire to continue involvement in competitive races like those hosted by Special Olympics.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-concept of winners and losers after participation in a Special Olympics competition. The study also examined the attitude of participants with mental retardation toward competition and the perceived importance of competing in the event.

The self-concept study was designed to compare differences in group means for three different groups of people participating in the Texas Special Olympics (TSO) State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas. The self-concept level of the participant was the variable measured. The measurement was taken immediately following the conclusion of the awards presentation, which followed participation in a race. Measurements were obtained for those participants placing first, second, or last in a race at the swim meet.

Differences among groups relative to attitudes toward competition was determined by interviewing participants at two different times. The first interview was conducted immediately following completion of the self-concept survey. A follow-up interview was conducted during a time eight to twelve

weeks following the swim meet. The time lapse between first and second interviews provided the participants the opportunity to evaluate and put into perspective their participation in the TSO events. Thus, an effort was made to measure the importance of participating in the TSO swim meet and any positive or negative feelings about the experience after the participants' resumption of daily activities. Included in the Follow-up Interview were the same questions asked during the Initial Interview. Again, these questions were asked to determine if the attitude for each of the three groups of participants was positive or negative relative to competing in the TSO State Swimming Meet.

The third aspect of this study was to determine the perceived importance of competing in the TSO State Swimming Meet. Several of the initial questions of the Follow-up Interview were designed to allow the subject to spontaneously mention participating in the TSO State Swimming Meet. The perceived importance of competing in the meet was determined by the number of individuals in each group who spontaneously recalled participating in the meet.

The subjects for this study were 151 mentally retarded participants that competed in the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth,

Texas. Depending on the athlete's finishing placement in a race, the individuals were placed in groups of winners (first place finishers), non-winners (second place finishers), or losers (last place finishers). The subjects were considered to be representative of Special Olympics athletes at a state level competition.

The subjects were interviewed and their responses to the self-concept scale and Initial Interview recorded immediately following the formal presentation of the awards for each race. The Follow-up Interview was conducted by having a personal telephone conversation with each subject within an interval of time of eight to twelve weeks following the TSO State Swimming Meet. The number of subjects who participated in the Follow-up Interviews was ninety-eight.

The data gathered during this investigation were subjected to statistical analysis procedures appropriate for the type of information gathered. Since the information relative to the self-concept scale was interval, the data were treated by using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine significant differences among groups of participants. Statistical procedures for the ANOVA were conducted at the .10 level of significance.

The data collected during the interviews were treated by the Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) Test, since the answers comprised a nominal scale. A .05 level of significance was used for the  $\chi^2$  test.

Significant differences among groups were noted for two items from the Initial Interview. Both of these items were relative to the hypothesis concerning the participant's attitude toward competition. The group of "losers" liked swimming in the race less than "winners and non-winners."

While this item rejects the hypothesis of no difference among groups, Cramer's Phi Prime indicates a low level of strength with regard to the significant differences among the groups. The small number of negative answers to Question #1 of the Initial Interview also contributes to the weakness of the statistical result. Of 150 respondents to Question #1 of the Initial Interview, only four "losers" and one "non-winner" indicated a negative attitude toward the race just completed. Therefore, while a significant difference was obtained, the expected frequency cells for  $\chi^2$  were too small to draw a strong conclusion relative to Question #1. Thus, based on the overwhelming majority of participants' (96.7%) favorable response to swimming in the race,

participating in events at Special Olympics appears to be a positive experience regardless of one's finishing place in a race. The results ranged from 93% of the losers to 100% of the winners indicating they liked swimming in the race. Damage to one's self-concept and negative feelings about the experience of competition was not evident as a result of losing a race at the TSO State Swimming Meet.

The second item revealing a significant difference among groups was Question #4 of the Initial Interview. The group of "non-winners" wanted to race other people when swimming more than the "winners or losers." More "winners and losers" had a desire to swim without racing than did the "non-winners." The cell sizes for expected frequencies of  $\chi^2$  were all high enough to consider this a strong finding. One reason for including 2nd place finishers in this study was to determine if losers who were "near-winners" expressed any different views relative to participating in Special Olympics. Based on the results to Question #4 of the Initial Interview, the value of their inclusion may be recognized.

Immediately following a race at the state swim meet, the desire to race when swimming was stronger for the "non-winners" than for the other two groups of

participants. One might theorize that most second place finishers at the state meet may have been first place finishers at all or most swim meets preceding the state competition. Therefore, they were accustomed to finishing in first place. By finishing in second place, perhaps more dissonance existed in the minds of "non-winners" at the conclusion of the race than for the other two groups. Perhaps the "non-winners" were experiencing a greater conflict between the expected and actual outcome of the race than the other two groups.

For example, many of the losers may not have placed first in events leading up to the state meet. The expectation to place first at the state meet may not have been as great compared to the other two groups. Therefore, the group of "losers" may have finished the race in a position which was close to their expectations. Then, when asked a question immediately following the race about whether they would rather swim without racing or race when swimming, some "losers" may have felt that they could enjoy swimming just as much when not racing, and racing would only result in the same thing that had just happened (losing). In fact, in reference to Question #1, "losers" disliked swimming in the race more than the

other two groups. As such, the results from Question #4, where a group of losers indicated a desire to swim without racing, was not unexpected.

Perhaps more surprising were the responses of the winners to Question #4. More "winners" than second-place finishers had a desire to swim without racing. The "winners," however, may have felt that they had just proved to be the best swimmers in their race, and their expectations were realized, creating no dissonance in their minds. Therefore, the "winners" had nothing to prove by racing, and the thought of swimming without racing was somewhat desirable. More "non-winners" may have felt a desire to race when swimming because the results of the race they had just finished was perhaps not what they expected. Namely, they did not win as they had expected, and, immediately following the race, they may have felt racing when swimming would give them another chance at achieving the expected outcome.

According to results from the data analysis of the information gathered at the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet, there was no significant difference among groups for each of the following items: (a) self-concept scores obtained immediately following participation in a race, (b) self-concept

scores comparing males and females participating in the events, (c) self-concept scores of subjects interviewed more than once during the swim meet ("repeat" winners, losers, etc.), (d) positive or negative attitudes of subjects about the way they felt regarding their performance in a race, and (e) positive or negative attitudes of subjects about their preference for swimming again in a race like the one they had just completed.

Based on results from the data analysis of information gathered during a Follow-up Interview with subjects, there was no significant difference among groups for the following items: (a) positive or negative attitudes of participants toward competition, and (b) perceived importance of Special Olympics participation.

With regard to positive or negative attitudes of participants toward competition, Question #10 of the Follow-up Interview was the same as Question #4 of the Initial Interview. The response to the question, however, was not the same. More "winners and losers" had a desire to swim without racing when interviewed immediately following competition, but at a time of eight to twelve weeks after competition, there was no

significant difference among the three groups relative to a desire to swim without racing.

Responses from the Follow-up Interview indicated the difference in results was due to fewer "winners and losers" expressing a desire to swim without racing, while more "non-winners" expressed a desire to swim without racing. One possible explanation could be that, after a period of time, "winners and losers" felt more of a desire to race since the immediacy of the event had passed. Because of a time lapse since last racing, perhaps the desire to race was greater for the "winners and losers" than what was expressed at the time immediately following the TSO State Swimming Meet.

Regarding the change in responses for "non-winners," perhaps, after a period of time, they have accepted the reality of placing second in a race. They may have realized that placing second should be viewed as success. By having time to evaluate the positive aspects of participating and placing second, the "non-winners" may have lessened the importance previously placed on winning and became more accepting of the position in which they did place. Therefore, the cognitive dissonance some may have experienced immediately following the race was resolved, and the thought of swimming without racing was more desirable.

Thus, after a period of time, no significant difference among groups was noted relative to their attitude toward competition as experienced in Special Olympics.

### Findings

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were made:

1. Self-concept scores of winners, non-winners, and losers were not significantly different relative to the place one finishes in a race at the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet.

2. At the immediate conclusion of their participation in a race, the losers at the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet had a slightly more negative attitude about their swimming in the race than did the winners and non-winners.

3. Eight to twelve weeks after participating in the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet, winners, non-winners, and losers did not differ with regard to their perception about swimming in a race. Both groups responded positively regarding their participation in a race at the TSO State Swimming Meet.

4. Winners, non-winners, and losers of races at the TSO State Swimming Meet had positive feelings about their performances.

5. Winners, non-winners, and losers of races at the TSO State Swimming Meet preferred to swim in similar races again if given the opportunity.

6. At the immediate conclusion of their participation in a race, non-winners (second place finishers) at the TSO State Swimming Meet preferred to swim when racing other people more than winners and losers. Stated conversely, more winners and losers than non-winners wanted to swim without racing. However, the majority of subjects in all three groups preferred racing against other people over swimming without racing.

7. At a time of eight to twelve weeks after participating in the Texas Special Olympics State Swimming Meet, winners and losers did not differ from non-winners regarding their attitudes toward racing other people. All groups had positive attitudes toward racing other people in a TSO State Swimming Meet.

8. The level of perceived importance of the TSO State Swimming Meet was not different for winners, non-winners, and losers, as measured by spontaneity of recall eight to twelve weeks after participation in the

event. Regardless of the finishing place in a race, all three groups were comparable regarding the number of subjects spontaneously mentioning the TSO State Swimming Meet as an important activity. The importance of participating in the event was not less for those losing a race when compared to first and second place finishers.

### Conclusions

Several conclusions may be made based upon the results of this study. In general, the subjects, immediately upon completion of the race, were more positive regarding their participation in the State Special Olympics Swimming Meet regardless of their place of finish. Furthermore, the subjects expressed interest in continuing to participate in a similar race if given the opportunity. The subjects' positive observations about participation in the Special Olympics were sustained or noted in follow-up interviews conducted eight to twelve weeks following participation in the state games.

While this study does not provide evidence that participation in the Special Olympics enhances self-concept, it does suggest that, in general, the

format of the Special Olympics meet is a positive experience for the athlete. The conclusion, while tentative and subject to further study, should serve to minimize concern that the Special Olympics games and their emphasis on competition are harmful to the Special Olympics athlete.

These conclusions will need to be verified through additional investigations with Special Olympics participants of various ages competing in other events, including individual and team sports.

#### Recommendations

On the basis of this study, it is recommended more studies be conducted using athletes with disabilities as subjects. Mentally retarded athletes, in particular, should be given an opportunity to express their feelings about participation in competitive environments. This study demonstrated the ability mentally retarded athletes have to communicate their thoughts relative to certain areas of questioning.

It is further recommended that replications of this study be done under various conditions including: (a) at other Special Olympics events where individual competition and performances are highlighted, such as

events like track and field, bowling, gymnastics, and figure skating; (b) at Special Olympics events where team competition takes place, such as basketball, floor hockey, soccer, and volleyball; (c) at Special Olympics events other than the state level competitions, such as local, district, and international events; and (d) at sporting competitions for populations with disabilities other than the mentally retardation.

On the basis of this study, Special Olympics programs should continue to emphasize the positive aspects of participation as the central focus of the games. Subjects from this study had an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward their experience and did not seem to be affected negatively as a result of having lost a race in the TSO State Swimming Meet.

On the basis of this study, it is recommended that non-winners in an event be praised more for participating in the race than for "nearly winning" the race. Perhaps if the athlete were helped to focus on the accomplishment of finishing the event, rather than getting a "second place finish," the perceived attitude about desiring to race more than the "winners and losers" might be diminished.

While several factors may affect the self-concept and attitude one has about competition, this study

demonstrated that overall significant differences among winners, non-winners, and losers regarding self-concept scores, attitudes about competing, and the importance of the event after a passage of time did not exist. In part, credit should go to the way the games in Special Olympics are organized and to all the individuals involved in interactions with the participants. As pointed out by Edmiston (1979), "More so than the 'normal' child, the mentally retarded child needs to be helped in order to develop positive self-experiences which will lead to a positive self-concept" (p. 25). As such, Special Olympics seems to be an organization which attempts to provide as positive an experience as possible in what must be viewed as a competitive environment.

Theoretically, negative feelings within participants could prevail since most of the athletes in Special Olympics are "losers." However, in Special Olympics, participants are encouraged and praised regardless of their performance. Perhaps by emphasizing the "praise" following the race, especially toward 2nd place finishers as previously discussed, Special Olympics athletes may be able to avoid the feelings which might be produced from an overemphasis on winning and, thus, failure. Such an approach is

supported by Anderson and Messick (1974) in their discussion of the development of self-concept. They reported, "Here is a case in which the goal is not necessarily to develop higher and higher feelings of worth but, rather, to avoid any instances of extremely negative self-depreciation" (p. 289).

One example to minimize any negative feelings by athletes was the use of "huggers" at the TSO State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth. At the end of each race, every athlete had a "hugger" giving praise for a great effort. Dietl (1983) highlights the job of the hugger by stating, "Huggers are very important. They exhort the athletes, bringing first hand, immediate praise for the efforts expended, whether they happened to be winning efforts or not" (p. 14). Such was the overall effect seen at the TSO State Swimming Meet, where the focus was on the positive.

Several (Kuffler, 1985; Orellove, 1982; Edmiston, 1979; Brickey, 1984; Polloway & Smith, 1978) have raised questions about the Special Olympics program regarding normalization and integration of individuals with mental retardation into the mainstream. Based on conversations with athletes and others regarding this study, Special Olympics seems to offer programs that are very much like other athletic competitions, with a

sensitivity to the special needs and interests of its participants. While some (Polloway & Smith, 1978; Edmiston, 1979; Brickey, 1984) have suggested Special Olympics is a segregated event which should make bolder moves to work its athletes into the mainstream, one may question what such moves might do to an organization which is revered by most of its participants.

Perhaps Eunice Shriver's quote in an article by Dietl (1983) best summarizes the defense against those saying Special Olympics works against mainstreaming. "Shriver says, 'The bedrock principle on which our program rest is this: for the majority of the mentally retarded, Special Olympics is the mainstream'" (Dietl, 1983, p. 13).

Based on the information from this study, Special Olympics organizers should continue to educate all involved, especially coaches and parents, to emphasize the quality of the effort rather than the place in the race. The athletes in the TSO State Swimming Meet in Ft. Worth, Texas came away with an overall positive feeling about the experience, regardless of winning or losing. Such is the goal of the Special Olympics organization, and, based on this study, the goal was met.

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APPENDICES

SELF-CONCEPT AND ATTITUDE SURVEY  
(Recording Sheet)

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ H. C. \_\_\_\_\_

Place in Race: 1st                      2nd                      Last      Event \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Are you a happy person?.....                             | Yes | No |
| 2. Do your looks bother you?.....                           | Yes | No |
| 3. Are you lucky?.....                                      | Yes | No |
| 4. Do you like being the way you are?.....                  | Yes | No |
| 5. Do you wish you were different?.....                     | Yes | No |
| 6. Are you unhappy?.....                                    | Yes | No |
| 7. Are you cheerful?.....                                   | Yes | No |
| 8. Do you have a pleasant face?.....                        | Yes | No |
| 9. Are you easy to get along with?.....                     | Yes | No |
| 10. Are you a good person?.....                             | Yes | No |
| 11. Are you strong?.....                                    | Yes | No |
| 12. Are you a leader in games and sports?.....              | Yes | No |
| 13. In games and sports, do you watch instead of play?..... | Yes | No |
| 14. Are you last to be chosen in games and sports?.....     | Yes | No |

1. Did you not like swimming in the race or did you like it?

Answer:    LIKE                      NOT LIKE

Comment? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you feel bad about the way you swam in the race or did you feel good?

Answer:    GOOD                      BAD

Comment? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Would you like to swim in a race like this again or would you rather not race again?

Answer:    LIKE TO                      RATHER NOT

Comment? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Would you rather race against other people or swim without racing?

Answer:    SWIM WITHOUT RACING                      RACE AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE

Comment? \_\_\_\_\_

Recorder \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ #1

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW  
(Recording Sheet)

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Area \_\_\_\_\_ Birth \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are some things you enjoy doing?
2. What are some things you have done recently that were a lot of fun?  
(If Special Olympics was mentioned, go to question #6!)
3. Have you done something recently that was very exciting or special?  
If so, what?  
NOTE: (If answer was "No," go to question #5. If Special Olympics was mentioned, go to question #6!)
4. What did you enjoy about \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
(Answer to question #3)
5. Did you participate in the Special Olympics Swimming Meet this summer?
6. What did you like about swimming in the Special Olympics?
7. What did you not like about swimming in the Special Olympics?
8. Did you feel good about the way you swam in the swim meet or did you feel bad?
9. Would you like to race in a swimming meet again or would you rather not?  
Why or why not?
10. Did you like racing against other people or would you rather swim without racing?  
Why or why not?