

Title: Explicit and implicit attitudes towards individuals with intellectual disability: The role of integrated sport participation

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Introduction: Attitudes refer to the way we consciously (explicitly) and unconsciously (implicitly) evaluate or feel about a particular subject. Implicit and explicit attitudes have been significant predictors of discriminatory behaviour towards marginalized groups (Greenwald, Banaji, & Nosek, 2015), including individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). The *contact hypothesis* (Allport, 1954) posits that negative attitudes towards a particular group can be reduced through purposeful, cooperative contact within a supportive environment. Over the past 50 years, Special Olympics (SO) has used sport participation as a mean for fostering inclusive communities and changing attitudes towards people with ID (Special Olympics, 2003). A more recently established Canadian organization, *Motionball for Special Olympics (Motionball)*, works to raise funds and awareness for SO. Specifically, Marathon of Sport is an event organized by Motionball that promotes integrated sport participation between SO athletes and adults without ID. Motionball aims to conduct fundraising, awareness campaigns about ID, and integrated sport competition to help strengthen positive attitudes towards people with ID. The aim of this study was to identify how involvement with Motionball (in terms of degree of participation) is associated with implicit and explicit attitudes towards individuals with ID.

Methods: An online survey was administered to individuals who took part in at least one Motionball event in the past 12 months. Data were collected from 141 adults (67.4% female; $M_{age} = 28.31$ years, $SD_{age} = 9.45$, Range: 18 to 61 years). Participants provided information about their prior involvement with Motionball, including the number of events attended in the past year, the number of years involved in Motionball, and amount of time spent interacting with SO athlete at the most recent event. Explicit attitudes were measured using three subscales of the Attitudes Toward Intellectual Disability Questionnaire – Short Form (ATTID-SF; Morin, Valois, Crocker, & Robitaille, 2019): Discomfort, Interaction, and Sensitivity. Implicit attitudes were measured using a survey-based Implicit Association Task (IAT; Carpenter et al., 2018). To control for socially desirable responding, participants also completed the Socially Desirable Response Set (SDSR-5; Hays, Hayashi, & Stewart, 1989). Additional information regarding prior knowledge or familiarity with ID, and experience with people with ID was collected through the ATTID-SF. Linear regressions were used to test whether Motionball involvement significantly predicted implicit and explicit attitudes.

Results: There were no significant associations between explicit and implicit attitudes towards individuals with ID. Implicit attitudes were significantly related to participant age ($r_s = -.22$, $p = .01$) and gender, $t(132) = -2.40$, $p = .02$, with males ($M = -.58$, $SD = .34$) showing more negative implicit bias compared to females ($M = -.43$, $SD = .34$). Age and gender were not related to any ATTID subscales (all $p_s > .05$). After controlling for age, gender, socially desirable responding, and prior knowledge of and contact with people with ID outside of Motionball, involvement in Motionball did not significantly predict implicit attitudes, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F_{change}(9, 116) = 1.77$, $p > .05$, or explicit sensitivity towards individuals with ID, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F_{change}(9, 121) = 0.97$, $p > .05$. Motionball involvement did significantly predict explicit discomfort towards individuals with ID, $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $F_{change}(9, 121) = 3.27$, $p = .02$, and interactions with people with ID, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $F_{change}(9, 121) = 2.77$, $p = .04$. More specifically, the number of Motionball events attended in the past year was a unique negative predictor of discomfort towards individuals with ID ($\beta = -.253$, $p = .01$).

Discussion: Involvement in Motionball does not appear to be related to implicit attitudes, which instead may be associated with demographic factors. More frequent involvement with Motionball was associated with less discomfort towards individuals with ID, which speaks to the potential benefits of participation. Further research examining the impact of integrated sport participation on community inclusivity and societal attitudes towards people with ID is warranted.

References/Citations:

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