Creating and Maintaining Gender Equity in Ice Arenas
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Gender equity has increasingly become an area of focus for practitioners and academics concerned about women's opportunities in sport. In academic studies focusing on gender equity, little attention has been given to the gender specific distribution of facility use and the gendered constructions of space in community recreation facilities. Despite paying the same amount of money for participation as women in many instances, male athletes have historically had more and better facilities available to them. Males have also been given more 'prime times' (Pell, 1988). This idea reinforces the notion that men are superior and matter more than women in sport. This study specifically addresses gender equity in hockey arenas with regard to policy implementation, the allocation of ice time, and the actual construction of space within these arenas. Achieving gender equity in the use of sport facilities is a constant challenge that, with or without policy, is difficult to address at all levels of government. In keeping with the objectives of enhancing sport and its effects in our country, federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments have made efforts to develop and implement various sport policies to ensure that these objectives are met. For the purpose of this study, both gender equity and ice allocation policies have been analyzed, using Laurence Chalip's (1995) critical policy analysis framework.

With regard to the allocation of ice time, it is important to note that hockey is a sport that has a long history of discriminating against women (Robinson, 2002). "Hockey associations are all about serving the needs of men and boys and often see women, and their demands for ice-time and recognition, as competing interests" (Robinson, 1997, p.123). While women's participation in hockey is rising (Hockey Canada, 2008), hockey in Canada remains administered predominantly by males and has little female involvement in positions of power. With the lack of female involvement, the assumption that men matter more in sports is reaffirmed in hockey. This idea aligns with the literature on masculine hegemony in sport, suggesting that unequal power relations are reinforced due to this male dominated structure. The construction of the physical environment within an arena provides an additional site for analysis of gender equity. Betsy Wearing (1998) points out that a vital part of the leisure experience for both males and females is space for leisure. Leisure becomes one's 'personal space' that, unfortunately, is difficult for males and females to share (Wearing). Females have to be comfortable in their personal space in order to want to be there. If women do not view ice arenas as a feasible space for their personal leisure time, they will not choose this as their personal leisure space. Daphne Spain (1992) extends this idea of leisure segregation by exploring the ways that gendered spaces are used by men to (re)produce their power and privilege.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to examine (in)equities in Ontario ice arenas in terms of distribution of ice time and gendered spaces. Thus far, policy analysis has been used to assess eight municipal policies: two on gender equity and six on ice allocation. The rationale and solutions from each of the documents were extracted and compared with one another to identify trends. Findings indicate that gender equity policies do not address the allocation of facilities, while ice allocation policies fail to include the notion of gender equity. Results from this policy analysis frame the second stage of this research, which focuses specifically on two Ontario cities. The two cities that will be involved in these case studies were chosen because one has a gender equity policy and the other does not. Three types of data will be collected in each city: site visits, document analysis, and interviews. All of the publicly owned arenas in both cities will be visited and a checklist of information based on my observations at each arena will be completed. These visits and the completion of the checklists will allow me to assess the ways that physical space has been created in the arenas. As well, comparisons between facilities of different ages and facilities in two cities that formally have differing views on the need for a gender equity policy in recreation will be possible. The checklist includes items such as: the number of dressing rooms, female only dressing rooms, adjoining bathrooms, height of hooks in dressing room, etc. Documents concerning the programming and allocation of ice will also be analyzed in both cities. From these, the actual amount of ice time provided to both male and female hockey organizations will be calculated. Lastly, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to critically explore the perceptions of recreation professionals concerning the benefits and challenges of having/not having a gender equity policy to follow when constructing and programming ice arenas.

Research surrounding gender equity issues in sport have generally focused on giving girls the opportunity to play on boys' teams. There is a lack of research and information on facility use between genders and the impact that policy has on the distribution of recreational facility use, including ice arenas. This research addresses gaps in the current literature and provides insights on a new and intriguing area of gender equity in sport. One objective of this research is to potentially illuminate and alleviate inequities by providing evidence to sport organizations and government officials that discriminatory practices negatively affect their status as...
an equal opportunity provider. In keeping with that sentiment, this research broadens current research findings on gender equity in sport by examining the relationship between gender equity policies and (in)equitable facility practices.