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### **“Actively engaged”? A critical analysis of the new Canadian policy for women and girls in sport**

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Social policy at the municipal, provincial/state, national and international levels continues to attempt to redress gender inequity or differentiation in sport. Indeed, the design, development and implementation of policy is the most utilized process to identify a course of action and effect social change. Gender equity policies are written to establish a course of action that uses strategies to remove real or perceived barriers to the full and equitable rights and participation of women (Blakemore & Drake, 1996). However, Shaw and Penney (2003) noted that equity policies may be inherently limited as their construction tends to be heavily influenced by dominant patriarchal views, particularly in sport.

Analyzing social policy is critical as it allows a deeper understanding of the social and technical issues associated with the policy, and ideally improves the quality and effectiveness of the agencies and programs directed toward effecting social change (Haas & Springer, 1998). Doherty and Varpalotai (2001) presented a multidimensional framework of gender differentiation in sport that may be used to analyze gender equity in sport policy. Following Fagenson (1990), they proposed that individual, structural, and cultural explanations about barriers to full access for girls and women in sport are interrelated perspectives. The individual perspective considers personal ability, interest and choice as constraints to participation; the structural perspective refers to organizational level barriers such as (inadequate) programming, funding, and other resources; the cultural perspective recognizes sport as a gendered activity in society that favours boys and men. The multidimensional framework argues that gender equity policy and strategies must attend to all three perspectives in order to effect meaningful social change with regard to the full participation of girls and women in sport (Doherty & Varpalotai, 2001). Recent related research supports this as Timmers, Willemsen, and Tjidsens (2010) found that all three perspectives in combination are indeed meaningful for reducing gender inequity.

The framework was used by Myers and Doherty (2007) to critique the 1986 Sport Canada Policy on Women in Sport, and its implementation in one national sport organization. They determined that initiatives to reduce or eliminate structural barriers were the predominant focus of that policy, with some attention to cultural barriers. For the most part, different policy areas addressed only one of the perspectives rather than all three. Myers and Doherty concluded that a balanced focus in each policy area would provide a more effective guide for sport organizations, which are likely to address only a few areas at a time. Since Myers and Doherty's study, the Government of Canada has released a new policy on women in sport, *Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls* (2009). The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which this policy aligns with the multidimensional framework of gender differentiation in sport.

A secondary purpose is to compare the focus of this new policy with the 1986 policy, as described by Myers and Doherty.

Discourse analysis focuses on the content and meaning of a policy (Henry, Amara, Al-Tauqi, & Chao, 2005) and is more interpretive and critical than traditional forms of policy analysis (e.g., Chalip, 1995; Radin, 2000). As such, the content of the policy was deductively analyzed by reviewing the policy statement, the four intervention areas (program improvement, strategic leadership, awareness, knowledge development), and corresponding action plans for each area, and classifying each with respect to the three perspectives (individual, structural, cultural) of the framework.

The presentation will provide a detailed review of the policy's relative attention to the three perspectives of gender differentiation in sport, and discuss any shifts in focus from the 1986 policy. The findings have implications for the ability of the new policy to effect social change with respect to ensuring women and girls are actively engaged in sport.

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