

LEISURE ACCESS WORK IN A NEOLIBERAL ERA: VALUES OF MUNICIPAL RECREATION STAFF

by

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Abstract

Continual budget cuts and the rise of neoliberalism have influenced a growing number of municipal recreation departments in local government to adopt market-driven principles focusing on cost reduction, revenue generation, and targeting the demands of middle and upper class citizens (Thibault, Kikulis, & Frisby, 2004). This has resulted in a shift away from the social liberal roots of public recreation that emphasized the inclusion of citizens regardless of socioeconomic status (Brodie, 2007; Scott, 2008). The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how municipal recreation staff negotiate 'leisure access work' with citizens living on low incomes in a neoliberal era. The research was informed by social liberal and neoliberal theories as well as Rao, Stuart and Kelleher's (1999) exclusionary power framework, which considers the influence of gender and power since leisure access work is arguably feminized. The study involved interviews and focus groups with twenty staff from different neighbourhoods in the City of Vancouver. The findings showed that both social liberal and neoliberal values are reflected in this work although in different capacities for different staff. The co-existence of these typically opposing ideologies sometimes contributed to tensions because of value incongruity, but at other times worked in combination to support leisure access work. The findings challenge simplistic binary conceptions that typically depict leisure access work as being social liberal and 'good' and government work environments as being neo-liberal and 'bad', building on research that suggests the values underpinning public sector work are more complex and fluid in nature (Graham & Phillips, 2007). Recommendations for future research and for the municipal recreation field are provided.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Municipal recreation originated in a social liberal political era and was a service provided by local governments to the public, regardless of socioeconomic status (Frisby, Alexander, & Taylor, 2009). However, under severe financial constraints and pressures to operate within a neoliberal political ideology, many municipal departments have shifted to a privatized style of service provision, which involves increasing the number and price of pay-per-use programs while decreasing low cost or free options (Thibault, Kikulis, & Frisby, 2004). As a result, traditional mandates are being compromised as a number of municipal recreation staff struggle to offer recreation opportunities for low income citizens who have few other options for participation (Frisby, Alexander, Taylor, Tirone, Watson, Harvey, & Laplante, 2005).

In Vancouver, where this study took place, the efforts recreation staff make to include low income citizens is called “leisure access work”. My research considered the perspectives of twenty staff who do leisure access work and examined how the values that drive their work are tied to the broader political ideologies of social liberalism and neo-liberalism, both which have had historic influences on public services in Canada (Brodie, 2007). I begin this chapter by discussing the literature on leisure access work and highlight some of the complexities it entails. I then explain the rationale for exploring the values that underlie this work and present my theoretical framework. At the end of this chapter, the purpose of this study and the research questions that guided my work are included.

Reid (1995) describes recreation practitioners as: “programmers and public administrators with direct service provision being their main responsibility” (p.25). A

direct approach to recreation service delivery means policies and programs are provided in a top-down fashion where upper management make assumptions about community needs and design policies and programs 'for' citizens, rather than 'with' citizens (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Frisby, Reid, & Ponc, 2007). People living on low incomes are the most commonly excluded group in municipal recreation (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002), and single mothers, older women, Aboriginals, immigrants, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the lowest income strata in Canada (Campaign 2000, 2005; Phipps, 2003). In efforts to fulfill organization mandates and include citizens on low incomes, recreation staff work with what are commonly called 'leisure access policies' (Taylor & Frisby, 2010). These policies typically involve an invasive application process where citizens are required to bring in government-approved documents to prove their level of poverty in order to be eligible for a subsidy, which is often still unaffordable (Reid et al., 2002). These policies have been criticized for discouraging the participation of low income citizens (Reid, 2004) and subsequently, some staff who administer them have been perceived as being insensitive to the needs of community members (Scott, 2000).

While I use the term 'leisure access' throughout my thesis because it is used by recreation staff to describe both their work and the policy that they have to implement, I would like to acknowledge at the outset that it is a problematic term. First, by focussing solely on access to recreation facilities and programs at a subsidized rate, there may be less regard for the quality of actual participation and, in spite of widely reported benefits of recreation participation, Donnelly and Coakley (2002) argue positive experiences are not always guaranteed. They discuss a number of factors that must be met for recreation participation to be a positive experience, including: a safe environment,

opportunities to develop and display competence, supportive social networks, moral and economic support, and autonomy and control. Frisby and Ponc (forthcoming) add that it is more likely that experiences will be positive when the circumstances of socially excluded people are taken into account, in part, by providing them with opportunities to provide input into program and policy development. Secondly, people living on low incomes face a number of barriers in addition to program costs that affect gaining access, such as transportation, childcare, proper clothing, social support, and body images issues (Frisby et al., 2007). As a result, defining leisure access in terms of reduced program fees alone is insufficient and the requirements to qualify for it can become one of the institutional mechanisms that contribute to rather than lessen social exclusion (Taylor & Frisby, 2010).

I argue that social inclusion is a better term for this work because it calls for direct engagement with groups of people commonly excluded from social programs to learn how policies and programs can be improved to facilitate their interests and needs (Shookner, 2002). Through these dialogues, it exposes the social, economic, and political structures that exclude particular groups of people from public programs and also acknowledges that low income citizens know best how their interests and needs can be met (Frisby & Millar, 2002; Labonte, 2004). It also challenges the idea of universal programming, which Labonte (2004) argues perpetuates further societal inequalities by forcing groups of people to fit in a general system that was not designed to accommodate them in the first place. Unlike the static connotation of “leisure access”, social inclusion is a dynamic social process through which policies and programs can be improved (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). As Ponc (2007) explains, it requires ongoing dialogue from the stages of initial brainstorming, through implementation, to evaluation.

In this light, social inclusion is not a simple process and does not always lead to clear solutions, but it provides a more comprehensive framework through which leisure access work can be conceptualized.

A recent study by Scott (2008) suggests that frontline staff who deliver leisure access services do more than simply administer policies. Staff in her study talked about going 'above and beyond' their job descriptions, developing relationships with patrons and approaching their work with sensitivity and compassion. Other studies reveal that people doing leisure access work care about improving access opportunities, but face a number of challenges doing so in a neoliberal work climate that prioritizes cost-reducing and efficiency strategies (Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Frisby & Millar, 2002). These studies provide some insight into the nature of leisure access work, but the underlying complexities and ideological tensions have yet to be explored. The following quote from a recreation staff person in Frisby and Millar's (2002) study provides an example of how this work is complicated.

If someone doesn't have the income to participate and their health is troubling them, or they don't have the transportation to get where they want to go, then recreation isn't going to mean anything to them. And until we can deal with the more important issues like poverty, they're not going to partake. So if I can address those issues with them and balance this out with recreation, then they can start to see some positive changes in their lives (p. 15).

As this quote illustrates, there is a level of sensitivity involved in leisure access work when staff attempt to address structural issues affecting personal circumstances such as the one described above. With these considerations, leisure access work may be related to that of social workers.

Social workers are trained to work with people living in difficult circumstances, to help people overcome barriers in their lives, and to facilitate positive opportunities

(Craig, 2002). Through their work, they advocate for improvements in bureaucratic systems that exclude groups of people, something that connects their work to social justice (Craig, 2002). As Barry (2005) explains, “social justice explicitly aims to redistribute resources to those disadvantaged by a market distribution” (p.358), and doing work from social justice values means addressing people’s needs for justice and fairness, as opposed to an act of charity. Few recreation staff have backgrounds in social work, yet some say having the knowledge and skills needed to work with low income citizens is essential for leisure access work (Scott, 2008). Some researchers believe municipal recreation can be a site for social justice if staff attempt to address barriers to participation through community development initiatives that engage the public (Reid et al., 2002).

Some staff may be pursuing a social justice mission when they do leisure access work, but there is other literature to suggest that they do not always receive support from their departments for their efforts (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). Allison (1999) discusses this in her study on organizational barriers that challenge the inclusion of diverse groups in both participation and employment in parks and recreation departments, based on qualitative data from 18 women and people of colour working in public recreation in the United States. She discussed diversity in its broadest sense, including issues of gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, age, and class. Allison (1999) found department policies that state a commitment to diversity such as, “we will serve all people in the city, regardless of race, color, creed, disability and so forth” (p.87), are more symbolic than substantive and are rarely discussed within the department. Consequently, approaches to diversity varied depending on personal values guiding individual staff. This is problematic because although some researchers

contend that staff should be committed to values of fairness and social justice (Henderson, 1997), this may not always be the case. This is because staff may be hired based on their willingness to conform to neoliberal values, which counteract values of fairness and social justice by disregarding societal inequalities (Brodie, 2007). As will be discussed in detail in the literature review, there appears to be a clash between different values that guide leisure access work and this can create significant tensions for those who deliver services on the frontline.

Values are part of larger ideologies which are defined as: “a set of social, political, and moral values, and attitudes, outlooks, and beliefs that shape a social group’s interpretation of its behavior and its world” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 145). Stewart, Parry, and Glover (2008) argue it is important to consider the impact of values and ideologies in recreation research because they reflect power differentials between groups of people in society, positions on democracy and citizenship, and “generally determine stances related to various socio-political relationships” (p. 362). While examining the implications of dominant ideologies in leisure and tourism services, researchers have seldom focused on values that underlie the work done, which is why I decided to undertake this study. Smith (1990) provides a definition of values: “A conception, measure, or expression of the preferences or ideals of an individual or group, particularly with respect to human behaviour or choices among alternatives” (p. 339). Some researchers, like Wright (2001), argue that people are more likely to work in organizations that are consistent with their personal values. He claims that the public workforce is expected to reflect the nature of work in the public sector, attracting people with altruistic values linked to an ethic of care. Yet, Stewart, Parry and Glover (2008) drew on the following quote from Crompton (1999) to illustrate how business-oriented

values influence the work of some recreation managers: “when any new service or facility is proposed, the starting point of managers with an entrepreneurial mind-set is to determine how it can be produced with minimal use of public funds and resources” (p. 369). Entrepreneurialism is linked to neoliberal values of cost reduction, efficiency, and competition, which McDowell (2004) argues counter an ethic of care. Some research suggests people working in market-based organizations find it difficult to synthesize personal and professional values when making work decisions (Reid, 1995). Considering this, there may be tensions between personal values and dominating organizational and political ideologies, which is something that has rarely been considered in previous research on public recreation. Next, I introduce the theoretical framework that informed this research.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 Social liberalism. Social liberalism was the dominant political ideology in Canadian governments following the Great Depression of the 1930s during what is known as the Welfare State (Brodie, 2007). Postwar welfare states were based on the idea that government should be responsible for regulating the market and making sure social resources are fairly distributed in efforts to minimize inequalities between citizens (Brodie, 2007). Social liberal ideology is a central focus in this study because it was during this political era that government became involved in recreation services for the Canadian public, and the foundational values of social liberalism continue to influence recreation mandates and mission statements today (Karlis, 2004). In order to analyze staff’s personal work values and their perceptions of the political values driving the departments they work within, it is important to first understand the ideology upon which their work was developed.

Social liberalists primarily concern themselves with serving the needs of the general public based on the notion of a collective responsibility for society (Newman, 2006). When Kershaw (2005) reviewed work by T.H. Marshall (1964) and John Rawls (1971), two 20th century leaders on the subject of social citizenship to examine the traditions of social liberalism, he identified three key underlying themes: social security, substantive equality of opportunity, and “a robust understanding of full community membership that calls for institutional redesign to facilitate dignified inclusion” (p.17). Social liberal-inspired governments prescribed equality of opportunity and dignified inclusion by taking on responsibility for social services like education and health care, ensuring they remained publicly accessible rather than entrusted to the capitalist market, which Brodie (2007) says is “incapable of ensuring fair distribution” (p. 98). The call for institutional redesign meant that some public administrations had to adopt a new ethos of planning to support a commitment to social justice and collective responsibility, progressive taxation, and the pooling of resources (Brodie, 2007). Although social liberalism has been critiqued for falling short on many of its aspirations, it successfully provided a language for groups of people who were systematically disadvantaged to make claims as citizens and to lobby for a collective responsibility of society (Brodie, 2007).

It has been suggested that Canada’s reputation as a ‘caring and sharing’ nation evolved during the social liberal era due to governmental commitment to social responsibility through social programming (Armstrong, 1996). Social programs were developed during the welfare state in response to a demonstrated public need for a sense of community and cohesion among Canadian citizens (Brodie, 2007). Public recreation was one social program developed for those purposes (Glover, 1999).

Although the term recreation can be interpreted in many different ways, the following was presented by Karlis (2004) to conceptualize Canadian recreation:

Recreation is the freely chosen activities partaken within a time period free from all obligations for the end result of self-satisfaction. These can be structured, unstructured, based on ethnic cultural traditions or defined by the host culture as part of the recreation industry (p. 39).

Through the premise of social programming, the government's role is to provide access to facilities where Canadians can do recreational activities in public parks, fields, swimming pools, ice rinks, and community centers (Thibault et al., 2004).

The historical evolution of public recreation reveals how it was grounded on values of social liberalism. In 1974, provincial ministers declared recreation as: "a social service in the same way that health and education are considered as social services" (National Recreation Statement, 1987). At that time, they outlined three purposes for Canadian recreation: to assist individual and community development, to improve quality of life, and to enhance social functioning. A fourth purpose was added in 1987: to improve physical and mental health (Karlis, 2004, p. 39). Over ten years later, the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council restated these purposes and reaffirmed the social liberal values of recreation as being to maintain a sense of community and cohesion among Canadians (National Recreation Statement, 1987). This statement also declared municipalities as the primary agents responsible for the delivery of public recreation services based on the notion that this level of governments is the closest to the general public and therefore can respond more quickly and effectively to the needs of communities (National Recreation Statement, 1987).

As a result of several recreation-related policies and acts that have been implemented since government became involved, recreation has become recognized by

some as a right of Canadian citizenship (Harvey, 2001; Karlis, 2004). Municipal recreation departments are in fact obligated to serve the diverse needs of their respective communities because they are primarily funded by tax dollars (McLean, Hurd, & Rogers, 2005; Searle & Brayley, 1993). While some researchers claim citizens are actively pursuing their right of recreation and placing service demands on municipal governments (Karlis, 2004), others are quick to point out the tendency of departments to cater to the needs of citizens who can afford to pay for services similar to the private sector (Thibault et al., 2004).

Today, many Canadian municipal recreation departments continue to display their social liberal roots by vowing to carry out their obligation of providing accessible recreation opportunities for all citizens (Harvey, 2001; Frisby et al., 2007). In the review of literature, I discuss how some recreation staff appear to support a social liberal ideology in their work through the values of social justice, social inclusion, community development, and an ethic of care. The problem is that the ability to pursue these social liberal values has been greatly challenged by the rise of the neoliberal ideology in municipal recreation and western governments more broadly.

1.1.2 Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an ideology that is composed of a set of values concerned with gaining prosperity in the market (Coburn, 2000), like cost reduction, revenue generation, and efficiency (Thibault et al., 2004; More & Stevens, 2000). Instead of keeping responsibility for social programs so that resources are fairly distributed, neoliberal governments allow the market to have control and promote competition as a regulating principle of society (Lazzarato, 2009). The neoliberal ideology began infiltrating Canadian municipal recreation in the 1960s and early 1970s when the federal government first redefined their responsibility for public recreation and

reduced their financial support to municipal departments (Searle & Brayley, 1993). In the mid 1980s, the neoliberal ideology started dominating Canadian politics when the Mulroney conservative party was elected into power (Brodie, 2005). Conservative parties characteristically oppose social liberal ideologies, particularly in their stance towards societal inequalities (Henry, 2001; Veal, 2002). Unlike social liberals, conservatives do not prioritize the alleviation of inequalities for disadvantaged groups. Instead, they endorse the maintenance of meritocracies because they allow the 'more able' to achieve advantageous positions in society (Henry, 2001) and this contributes to conservative values of elitism and wealth accumulation (Veal, 2002). Some believe the emergence of the neoliberal ideology "systemically eroded the foundational assumptions of social liberalism" (Brodie, 2007, p. 99).

The Mulroney government is said to have taken direction from conservative world leader Margaret Thatcher, who lead Britain as Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990 (Brodie, 2005). Thatcher's political leadership emphasized individualism and the superiority of the market, two key characteristics of neoliberalism (Coalter, 2000). Regarding public services, she also endorsed privatization and market competition (Coalter, 2000). According to Brodie (2005), the conservative government pursued these market-driven ideals for Canadian public services and implemented a significant shift in Canadian politics at all levels.

Further retrenchment occurred in the 1990s when deficit and debt reduction were a primary focus of the federal government (Thibault et al., 2004). At this time, public services sustained severe financial cutbacks and the responsibility for public recreation was transferred over to municipal government and the private sector (Seale & Brayley, 1993). Reduced budgets and an increased demand for services among increasingly

pluralistic communities ultimately influenced a shift to cost-reduction and revenue generating initiatives (Thibault et al., 2004). In this way, municipal recreation began to resemble the private sector with an increase in pay-per-use services (Karlis, 2004).

The implications of the rise of a neoliberal ideology in municipal recreation are significant for municipal recreation staff because prioritizing entrepreneur-like values is in opposition to the historical social liberalist foundations of leisure access work. This issue is of concern because, as Veal (2002) suggests:

It is difficult to reconcile the value of favouring social equality with that of favouring individual enterprise, since giving full reign to the latter inevitably results in inequality of outcomes. So it would not make much sense for one person or organization to espouse both those values at the same time (p. 36).

Inspired by Veal's (2002) last statement, this research is concerned with how staff go about their work when the literature suggests that competing values exist in municipal recreation departments. While the literature tends to treat neoliberalism and social liberalism in oppositional and binary terms, Graham and Phillips (2007) are among the few authors to suggest that the values underpinning public sector work are more fluid in nature and may co-exist simultaneously. Given the importance of this work to those who perform it and to citizens living on low incomes who are seeking public recreation services, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining how social liberal and neoliberal values are implicated in leisure access work.

In the next section, I provide further details about the nature of this work by describing how it has become feminized. I also discuss how exclusionary power may be operating at an organizational level to make one ideology dominant over the other.

1.1.3 Feminized leisure access work. Negotiating leisure access work within a dominant ideological environment may be further challenged by gender inequalities in municipal recreation. Shaw and Hoeber (2003) discuss employee roles as expressions of hierarchies in sport organizations that reflect individuals' abilities to influence change within their organization. Gender is an influential determinant of employee roles (Acker, 2000), and gender hierarchies of men and women's work are a reflection of power in organizations (Fletcher, 1999). Organizational power is defined as: "the capacity to affect outcomes and goals in organizations" (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989, p. 51). Gender and power inequalities are problematic in sport organizations because women and feminine discourses are associated with employee roles that are often undervalued.

Upper management in municipal recreation departments are most often male (Aitchison, 2000) and, although lower level leisure access roles may not always be filled by women, the work is arguably feminized because the nature of this work involves caring for others, being attentive to others' needs, and showing compassion, which are characteristics the literature often links to women's work (Fletcher, 1999). Feminized work skills such as collaborating, nurturing, and listening are essential when doing community development work (Dominelli, 2006), but are commonly undervalued in organizations that uphold masculine values like efficiency, competition, and autonomy (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Fletcher, 1999; McDowell, 2004). Gender-based stereotypes are problematic in sport organizations as Shaw and Frisby (2006) point out: "This stereotypical viewpoint characterizes women as caring not aggressive, good at organizing but not big picture thinkers, and domestically oriented rather than career minded" (p. 487). In light of these stereotypes, many women struggle to obtain upper management positions (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003), and Ely (1995) explains that if men

dominate senior positions, the organization's standards for success are more likely to reflect masculine values. This could be problematic in organizations that espouse feminine working skills such as those required for leisure access work.

1.1.4 Exclusionary power. In her study on gender equity in a sport organization, Hoeber (2007) used a form of organizational power called 'exclusionary power' as conceptualized by Rao, Stuart, and Kelleher (1999) to frame gendered power relations. Exclusionary power is the notion that these relations are exercised through positional power, agenda-setting power, hidden power, and the power of dialogue (Rao et al., 1999). This is a helpful framework for considering how power influences the values driving leisure access work.

Positional power is a consequence of one's title or status in an organization (Rao et al., 1999). Hoeber (2007) explains that in male-dominated sport bureaucracies, people in upper management positions are the ones who have legitimate authority over others and possess the greatest decision-making power. Positional power can be used to control resources, create space for change, and modify organizational practices (Rao et al., 1999). While there is a strong presence of women working in the recreation field, research has shown that similar to other professions they are less likely to occupy senior management positions than men (Aitchison, 2000; Henderson, 1997).

In addition to positional power, agenda-setting power means having the authority to decide what is and is not important for an organization (Rao et al., 1999). The danger with this form of power is that if management does not see certain issues as being problematic, it is unlikely that they will be addressed (Hoeber, 2007). Allison (1999) provides an example as the staff in her study felt diversity was of low concern for management who held agenda-setting power, consequently, they reported having

difficulty getting diversity initiatives on the department's agenda. Unfortunately, a lack of finances is often used as justification to oppose new initiatives, making some staff feel that the budget is more important to management than the potential benefits of increasing recreation participation (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

Hidden power is expressed when individuals in lower level positions accept their relative low level of organizational power and do not attempt to advocate for change so certain ideas or values become accepted as normative for the organization (Rao et al., 1999). A potential problem with hidden power in municipal recreation is that ideologies that are assumed to be the norm at a senior management or political level can create on-going challenges for those who do front-line work with marginalized citizens.

The power of dialogue considers whose voices are consulted and whose are excluded or silenced within organizations (Rao et al., 1999). This form of power ties together the consequences of expressed positional, agenda-setting, and hidden power and acts to maintain particular ideologies. While several studies have drawn attention to the importance of hearing from the intended beneficiaries of public recreation services through social inclusion and community development initiatives (Frisby et al., 2005; Reid, 2004), few studies demonstrate the benefits of hearing from lower level employees about their work in this area. My study addresses this gap by considering how gender and power imbalances affect the ability of municipal recreation staff to negotiate social liberal and neoliberal norms.

1.2 Purpose and Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of leisure access work to determine how municipal recreation staff in Vancouver negotiate this social liberal work in a neoliberal era. This was accomplished through interviews and focus groups with twenty municipal recreation staff. My research questions were as follows:

- (i) How are social liberal and neoliberal values reflected in leisure access work,
- (ii) What are the major challenges in leisure access work and how are they connected to social liberal and neoliberal ideologies, and
- (iii) How do municipal recreation staff negotiate the potentially conflicting values in their work?

An implication of this study was that a greater understanding of how to support this type of work would be uncovered. Previous studies have made recommendations for the improvement of leisure access services based on input from low income citizens (Frisby et al., 2005; Reid, 2004), but few have included the perspectives of staff. As a result, their opinions on the plausibility of recommendations for change are unknown. In this sense, my study may provide new practical information to municipal recreation management on how to deal with the value incongruities that may be underpinning leisure access work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the literature review, I expand on the theoretical framework presented in the introduction that conceptualizes leisure access work as a feminized profession founded on a social liberal ideology that is challenged by the rise of neoliberalism. In the first section, I discuss how certain values have been linked to a social liberal ideology and I also highlight some ways in which social liberal work is considered feminized and consequently devalued. In the second section, I describe the influence of neoliberalism on municipal recreation and discuss some specific neoliberal values identified in the literature that create contradictions for leisure access work. In the final section of this chapter, I review power and gender struggles and discuss how exclusionary power may affect the experiences of those doing this work in more depth. Gaps in the literature are identified throughout the literature review to build a case for conducting this study.

Section 1: Leisure Access as Social Liberal Work

One of the most informative studies for my research was done by Scott (2008) who conducted interviews and focus groups with municipal recreation staff on Vancouver Island who were working with a leisure access initiative called Active Communities. Her work highlights some of the conflicts that arise while doing leisure access work in a neoliberal era and raises more questions regarding underlying the complexities. Using social marketing theory, she discussed her findings in terms of 'costs' and 'benefits' and refers to community members as 'consumers' and municipal recreation as an 'industry', terminology that I argue relates to neoliberalism. Conversely, her study provided helpful insights into how frontline staff approach leisure access work and demonstrated how it is linked to social liberalism. Leisure access work was not

explicitly called social liberalism, but as Scott's study (2008) and others reveal, it is often carried out in connection with the values that underpin this ideology. Some of the overlapping values tied to social liberalism in the literature include social justice, social inclusion, community development, and an ethic of care. While this list of values is not intended to be exhaustive, I decided to focus on these four values because they have been most commonly linked to public recreation work. Below I show how each value has been tied to a social liberal ideology in the literature and expose some of the tensions that arise while doing this work in neoliberal work and political environments (Thibault et al., 2004).

2.1 Social Justice

The concept of social justice emerged in the late 18th century out of the industrial and French revolutions (Jackson, 2005). It was popularized in the 19th century when western societies became concerned about "the ethical foundations of modern societies and the role of the state in advancing social goals", and entered government politics during the welfare state when social liberalism dominated (Brodie, 2007, p. 95).

Considering its history, there are many different conceptualizations of social justice in the literature, but most theorists agree it is based on a notion that government should be responsible for the distribution of resources with a particular emphasis on helping those who are disadvantaged by the economic market (Craig, 2002; Jackson, 2005). Many argue that an unregulated market generates economic inequalities, causing both social and economic injustice (Barry, 2005). Craig's (2002) definition of social justice informed my study because it outlines specific values that guide work done from this perspective:

[Social justice is] a framework of political objectives, pursued through social, economic, environmental and political policies, based on an acceptance of difference and diversity, and informed by values concerned with: achieving fairness, and equality of outcomes and treatment; recognizing the dignity and equal worth and encouraging the self-esteem of all; the meeting of basic needs; maximizing the reduction of inequalities in wealth, income and life chances; and the participation of all, including the most disadvantaged (Craig, 2002, p. 671-672).

Craig (2002) adds that the only way social justice can be achieved is “within an explicitly value-led framework determined by the state through publicly-funded services” (p. 672).

Achieving fairness is linked to the term equity, which is different than the term equality that denotes sameness (Henderson, 1997). It is important to make this distinction because much of the social justice literature talks about pursuing equal opportunities (Barry, 2005), but Rawls (1999) argues that social justice requires fairness, not sameness, as it is about distributing resources in ways that advantage more groups of people. Achieving fairness and equity is often a focus in the recreation literature. As an example, Henderson (1997) argues that recreation departments must seek equitable solutions that facilitate fair opportunities for different people to access their services and that recreation professionals are responsible for ensuring that participation does not contribute to the devaluation of individuals or groups. Based on these arguments, she contends that under the right conditions, recreation contributes to social justice.

Underlying the idea of achieving fairness is recognizing people’s dignity and equal worth, another dimension of Craig’s (2002) definition of social justice. The literature describes social work councillors who are guided by the values of social justice approaching their work in recognition of people’s dignity with dedication to

compassion, sensitivity, and empathy for their clients and their particular circumstances (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Municipal recreation staff in Scott's (2008) study recognized compassion and patience as integral dimensions of their work and stressed the importance of being non judgmental in order to welcome a variety of people. As one staff person in her study noted, this is not a simple process:

The willingness to take some risks, to embrace diversity to try and be non judgmental, it is a tricky walk to walk sometimes, um, having a knowledge of the community is really important I think, it is really helpful (p. 88).

Despite these complexities, all staff in Scott's (2008) study described feeling rewarded when they are able to promote recreation inclusion for individuals.

"Having knowledge of the community" as quoted above refers to an awareness of basic needs in the community and working to meet them which is another dimension of social justice (Craig, 2002; Jackson, 2005). Craig (2002) has critiqued this dimension when it appears on government agendas because when simply listed as a goal it avoids the question of what basic needs actually are. He calls for community development as a means of ensuring social justice by engaging with excluded and marginalized people to determine what their needs are. Reid, Frisby and Ponic (2002) claim public recreation is a promising site for doing community development and social justice work to redress structural sources of inequality by determining how current policies and resources benefit some groups over others. Structural inequalities are a primary focus of social inclusion efforts (Labonte, 2004), which is another process by which social justice can be achieved (Ponic, 2007).

2.2 Social Inclusion

There are many different interpretations of social inclusion in the literature and in practice and Mitchell and Shillington (2002) warn it can not be reduced to one dimension or meaning. Considered to be both a process and an outcome, meaning it is something that can be both planned and evaluated (Frisby & Ponic, forthcoming), social inclusion calls for direct engagement with groups of people commonly excluded from social programs to learn how policies and programs can facilitate their interests and needs (Shookner, 2002). In doing this, a focus on the value of social inclusion exposes the social, economic, and political structures that create barriers that exclude particular groups of people (Labonte, 2004). Mitchell and Shillington (2002) explain the benefits of operating from social inclusion values:

Social inclusion is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society. It is, therefore, a normative (value based) concept - a way of raising the bar and understanding where we want to be and how to get there (Mitchell & Shillington, 2002, p. viii).

Some dimensions of social inclusion overlap with definitions of social justice, such as recognizing and respecting diversity, but two dimensions make this value distinct: honouring rights of citizenship and acknowledging and addressing barriers to inclusion. Donnelly and Coakley (2002) argue that social inclusion assumes basic rights of citizenship, which include social, economic and individual human rights. Similarly, (Karlis, 2004) contends that recreation is recognized as a social right of Canadian citizenship. Honouring an entitlement to rights and services is one of the most significant dimensions of social inclusion approach according to Shookner (2002).

Another dimension is acknowledging and addressing barriers. Recognizing people living on low incomes as the most commonly excluded group in municipal recreation, Donnelly and Coakley (2002) identified a list of barriers that prevent their participation such as: timing and scheduling, affordability, the nature of activities, and a lack of social support. Frisby and her colleagues (2005) found additional barriers in their study with youth and parents from low income families in five different Canadian cities. These included program locations, transportation, uninviting program structures, and experiences with racism and gender discrimination. Yet, most of the youth and parents in Frisby et al.'s (2005) study wanted to be included in municipal recreation because they recognized the potential benefits of participation.

Before discussing how community development can foster social inclusion, it is important to acknowledge some of the critiques of this value. First, Shakir (2005) critiques the assumption that inclusion is desirable and exclusion is not because of its patronizing undertones, which he argues at its worst, provokes a blaming of individuals for their own exclusion. That is, including people in programs that do not address the social, economic, and political structures that excluded them in the first place may actually cause more harm. In addition, Labonte (2004) critiques universal programming for perpetuating further societal inequalities by forcing groups of people to fit in a general system that was not designed to accommodate diverse needs. Labonte (2004) asks critical questions like: "To what extent do efforts at social inclusion accommodate people to relative powerlessness rather than challenge the hierarchies that create it?" (Labonte, 2004, p. 117). These are important questions for recreation staff who do leisure access work to consider as Frisby and Ponick (forthcoming) warn: "social inclusion is a complex process and requires more than simply 'opening the doors' to

everyone” (p. 13). None-the-less, as I have argued earlier, the value of social inclusion lies in its focus on tackling the larger structural conditions that contribute to social inequalities.

2.3 Community Development

Community development strategies originated in Canada within the field of social work and were particularly strong during the welfare state when there was a call for people to work together to address social needs (Karlis, 2004). Similar to social inclusion, community development is a process that involves engaging in dialogue with community members to determine what their needs are and how they can be met (Ife, 2003). Those who work from community development values focus on organizing and mobilizing communities for collective action in pursuit of institutional development and change (Lawson, 2005). This approach often brings together various professionals from the public sector but requires community members to be the primary stakeholders in planning and implementations processes, thereby contributing to shared goals and objectives (Davidson Perlmutter & Cnaan, 1999).

Lawson (2005) argues that social workers, more than any other profession, employ community development in their work to “combat the antecedents, correlates, causes, and consequences of widespread poverty, social exclusion, social isolation, and inter-group conflict and hostility” (p. 155). According to Lawson (2005), it is this type of work in a sport and recreation context that can lead to improved health and well-being of oppressed people, communities that promote health and well-being as well as sustainable economic and social development, and efforts to lobby for policy improvements at government levels.

Andrew, Harvey, and Dawson (1994) connected the absence of community development in public recreation in the 1970s through to the 1990s to a shift from 'citizen participation-orientations' to 'consumer choice orientations', where citizens are sometimes asked about their preferences for services but are not included in decision making processes. This illustrates a shift from social liberalism to neoliberalism. However, there are documented cases of resistance to this trend (Harvey, 2001). One example is the Women Organizing Activities for Women project that was designed to promote the health of women living on low incomes through a community development approach to recreation (Frisby & Millar, 2002). Members of the group included 85 women living on low incomes, university-based researchers, and several public sector employees, including three public recreation staff. The project formed when staff from a local recreation department and the lead researcher organized a workshop to learn about ways that access to health promoting forms of recreation could be improved for diverse women living on low incomes. The group continued to meet regularly for the next five years and much weight was placed on obtaining input from low income citizens based on an assumption that they know best how their interests and needs can be met (Frisby & Millar, 2002). Public sector staff felt the Women Organizing Activities for Women project was a rewarding learning experience for their organizations, as one recreation staff person said: "I am learning so much from the women. I just hope they realize what an influence they are having on WOAW and the community partners and the organizations we represent" (Frisby & Millar, p. 222). Despite this, the recreation staff appeared to struggle with some of the principles of community development, particularly the extra time it requires and a consensus decision-making model because this contradicted the dominant neoliberal or more business-oriented ideology that was

driving their department. They acknowledged that increasing participation should be a collaborative effort and involve learning about and addressing wider social structures that contribute to poverty, but they questioned the support they would receive from their departments to do so. Despite these tensions with their organizations, one staff person made the following remark: “We really do care. We want to be able to support that group that has been forgotten” (Frisby & Millar, 2002, p. 14). This statement demonstrates the passion that some people put into the social liberal work that they do.

2.4 Ethic of Care

Like social inclusion and community development, an ethic of care can be conceptualized as a social process (Williams, 2001), whereby individuals concentrate on being attentive to how they may be able to help others (Tronto, 1993). Williams (2001) argues that an ethic of care supports social justice because, “the processes of caring for or being cared for make one aware of diversity, of interdependence, of the need for acceptance of difference” (p. 477). This, she argues, forms a basis for citizenship. Along with interdependence and acknowledging and accepting diversity, Williams (2001) suggests that trust, respect, and taking responsibility to care for one another are other dimensions of an ethic of care.

While care-based work is concerned with honouring diversity and working together to reduce inequalities (McDowell, 2004), it has also been linked to helping others develop autonomy and independence. Williams (2001) clarifies that an ethic of care approach to work means valuing one’s self-determination and free will, as opposed to encouraging self-sufficiency or competitiveness, which are connected to a neoliberal ideology (Lazzarato, 2009). As Williams (2001) explains:

Autonomy and independence are about the capacity for self-determination rather than the expectation of individual self-sufficiency. It recognizes that vulnerability is a human condition and that some people are constituted as more or less vulnerable than others, at different times and in different places (p. 487).

Care “givers” work to provide choice and control to care “receivers”, redefining the concept of autonomy to fit with the idea of interdependence where relationships are built based on shared negotiation and mutual respect (Williams, 2001).

There is some evidence to suggest that leisure access workers are dedicated to providing services that encompass an ethic of care. Staff in Scott’s (2008) study talked about going ‘above and beyond’ their job descriptions and doing their best to alleviate financial barriers for participants. The following quote is an example: “If they can’t afford it...we make it so that if they want to do schedule payments... or third party billing, those kind of things, we try to make that available to them” (p.85). Such dedication is linked to facilitating access for people who may not otherwise participate and is considered a rewarding experience for some staff (Scott, 2008). Kershaw (2005) argues that an ethic of care should be a central human concern and not an exclusive response or obligation for women, even though he acknowledges that this is rarely the case.

2.5 The Feminization of Social Liberal Work

Caring for others, being attentive to others’ needs, and showing compassion are traditionally linked to women’s work (Fletcher, 1999). In their study on the experiences of female caregivers, Dupuis and Smale (2000) explored reasons why women more commonly fulfill caring roles than men. One argument was that women are “socialized into an ethic of care and are culturally conditioned to feel a sense of obligation to care for others” (p. 306-307). McDowell (2004) criticizes this argument for its essentialist undertones, contesting that it is inaccurate to suggest women automatically think and

act based on an ethic of care. Despite her critique, McDowell (2004) maintains that the association between care-based work and gender is undeniable as women hold the majority of caring occupations in the service industry. This argument can be extended to other social liberal values as women are also more commonly in community development and social justice roles, often as social workers and councillors (Craig, 2002; Dominelli, 2006; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001).

The work that women do has been devalued since the days when their work was reserved for the private-family setting (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). As Dominelli (2006) describes:

An ideology of caring as 'women's work' configures this activity as socially devalued while leaving those performing it in the background. Caring work is considered second-rate work even when performed for a wage and is dogged by low pay (p. 35).

There is some evidence to suggest that women who work in recreation feel their work is unappreciated. For example, female volunteers from provincial and community-level sport and recreation clubs observed they had a more 'personal approach' to their work than the men in the organizations, but felt that they were not respected for the work they were doing (Recreation Nova Scotia, 2007). The problems with devaluing women's work appears to be magnified in organizations that operate under a neoliberal ideology, which have less appreciation for social liberal values because masculinized working skills are emphasized (Brodie, 2007; McDowell, 2004).

Section 2: Neoliberal Values and Leisure Access Work

As discussed in Chapter One, the shift into neoliberal politics constituted more financial cutbacks to Canadian public services and a downloading of responsibility onto municipal governments (Thibault et al., 2004; Searle & Brayley, 1993). Municipal governments already have limited budgets, with the only sources of income coming from property taxes, development charges, permits, and admissions. They are also not normally allowed to run at a deficit (Torjman, 2004). Municipal services commonly function on a cost-recovery basis, meaning profits are recycled back into the organization to support other programs (Reid, 1995). Large recreation facilities, such as skating rinks and swimming pools, are generally very expensive to operate, which creates financial pressure on recreation departments work, especially under conditions of budget cuts and government restructuring.

Neoliberalism is an ideology that is composed of a set of values concerned with gaining prosperity in the market (Coburn, 2000). The discussion above on budget constraints explains how some values have come to underpin a neoliberal ideology, namely efficiency, accountability, cost reduction, and revenue generation. Since neoliberal politics afford less attention to societal inequalities and the social, economic, and political structures that challenge the ability of some people to access public services, individuals who are structurally disadvantaged and are left to fend for themselves (Coburn, 2000). This is an example of individualization, another neoliberal value which will be discussed next.

2.6 Individualization

Individualization assumes individuals are responsible for their own well-being, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Anderson, 1996; Brodie, 2005; Lazzarato, 2009). This is associated with social inequalities being considered fair or inevitable because “what one puts into the market one gets out” (Coburn, 2000, p. 138). As a result, poverty is perceived to be a failure to take advantage of one’s opportunity in the marketplace (Galabuzi & Labonte, 2002; Raphael, 2003). In this way, people living on low incomes become blamed for their life circumstances (Brodie, 2005), and health promotion researchers refer to this as ‘victim blaming’ (Raphael, 2003).

There is evidence to suggest that victim blaming occurs in municipal recreation settings. Frisby et al. (2005) found that youth from low income families were unfairly homogenized as being ‘at risk’ by recreation staff and fellow participants. This created harmful stereotypes, such as labelling low income youth as future criminals, and few programs were developed to address their diverse needs and interests. Instead, low income youth and their parents were left to seek out recreation opportunities on their own, which helps to illustrate how neo-liberalism operates in this context. In another example, recreation staff in Allison and Hibbler’s (2004) study reported prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes coming from their co-workers directed at ethnically diverse members. For example, one person said: “Why do we go through all this trouble, they’re not going to show up anyways and then they’ll complain about our programs and say we didn’t meet their needs and we didn’t have what they want” (p. 275). The underlying message is “Why should we help them if they’re not going to help themselves?” (Allison & Hibbler, 2004, p. 275).

Anderson (1996) discussed individualization in her research on the health care experiences of immigrant women from racialized groups who had chronic illnesses. She found that even when inequalities were recognized and health promotion initiatives were developed with the intention of improving accessibility for marginalized groups, individuals were still urged to take responsibility for their own health and well-being. This is an example of how individualization can become embedded in policy decisions and health promotion practices. As Anderson (1996) explains: “there is a deep seated conviction that individuals have equal opportunities and are equally able to take responsibility for their health” (p. 702).

2.7 Efficiency

Reduced budgets in municipal recreation have pushed departments into efficiency strategies where management looks for areas to cut costs and generate revenue (Thibault et al., 2004). Efficiency refers to accomplishing more while investing fewer resources (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004). Emphasis is placed on quantitative performance measures and ‘the bottom line’, which places the focus on services that produce a return on investment (Frisby & Millar, 2002). According to Brodie (2005), neoliberal-inspired politicians have infused efficiency strategies that were developed for the private sector into public services into their daily work practices. She provides an example from the health-care system where the work of nurses is measured based on time allocation per patient rather than the quality of care they provide. Pressures to accomplish more while investing less time or effort causes tensions for people who approach their work with an ethic of care that emphasizes taking time to be attentive to the situations of others (Tronto, 1993).

The literature suggests that when efficiency dominates and cost reduction and revenue generation become priorities, municipal recreation departments mimic the private sector by targeting middle and upper class citizens who can afford to pay for services (Frisby & Millar, 2002; Thibault et al., 2004). Researchers point out that responding to the demands of loyal paying customers makes sense in terms of economic survival (Scott, 2000; Parr & Lashua, 2004), so increasing the number and cost of user fees is one way departments attempt to generate increased revenues. Much of the literature on leisure access criticizes user fees for creating barriers for the participation of people living on low incomes (More & Stevens, 2000), but Bird and Tsiopoulos (1997) provide a neoliberal efficiency rationale for their proliferation. They believe that there should be charges for public services whenever possible, rather than 'giving them away'. Drawing on a typical neoliberal argument, they contend that user fees provide an efficient way to extend limited government resources because they inform departments what services people want and what they are willing to pay for. More and Stevens (2000) are among several researchers who critique the emphasis on efficiency rationale based on their findings in a study on the impacts of user fees on low income people: "The efficiency approach, which assumes that all value is captured in a willingness-to-pay measure, is not necessarily fair since it fails to account for differences in the *ability* to pay" (p. 352). As Frisby et al. (2005) explain, "serving marginalized citizens does not contribute to these types of 'bottom line' indicators" (p. 13).

A number of recreation departments recognize the problem with user fees and attempt to mitigate it with leisure access initiatives (Taylor & Frisby, 2010). A problem is, however, that recreation departments commonly underestimate the complications in the

lives of low income families so initiatives rarely address the multiple barriers standing in their way (Frisby et al., 2007). To illustrate, More and Stevens (2000) discussed two different programs: 'free Tuesdays' and 'volunteer in exchange for admission'. Both of these initiatives fail to recognize the complications for working low-income people who sometimes hold multiple jobs and often have inflexible schedules and less free time. In addition, neither program addresses other barriers like childcare or transportation. Furthermore, the 'volunteer for admission' option has a coercive element because participation is no longer viewed as a right of citizenship – it is something that must be 'paid for' by offering up one's spare time (More & Steven, 2000).

As user fees are introduced as ways to generate revenue (Bird & Tsiopoulos, 1997), decreasing or eliminating low user fee services are one way municipal recreation departments look to save costs (Thibault et al., 2004). An example of low user fee services in Vancouver is 'loonie/toonie swims' where children can access public swimming pools for a dollar and adults for two dollars. Not all pools offer these sessions and the ones that do vary in length and occurrence across the city, with some pools advertising loonie/toonie swims once a week for a four hour period and others two or three times a week for one to two hours (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, n.d.). By decreasing or eliminating such services, recreation facilities have more time slots available for programs they can charge full user fees for. Consequently, recreation opportunities are decreased for low income citizens (Reid et al., 2002), causing potential tensions for those who work to include them.

Examples of efficiency stretch beyond user fees and low cost options to daily policies and practices in municipal recreation. A common policy involves cancelling programs if predetermined attendance numbers are not met (Thibault et al., 2004). Reid

(1995) claims recreation services providers undertaking evaluations focus on enrolment numbers and financial viability, while social and psychological needs of participants are of less concern. The costs of instructors, space, and equipment must be justified with a particular number of participants for the program to be considered worthwhile. Low attendance numbers are attributed to low interest, when the problems may really lie with the way in which programs are delivered (Thibault et al., 2004).

Furthermore, some recreation staff have described having to demonstrate that subsidies bring in revenue in order to convince upper management that leisure access policies are worth while (Frisby et al., 2005). This is a neoliberal practice that occurs when the value of efficiency dominates at a managerial level, as the following quote from Allison and Hibbler (2004) illustrates:

Unfortunately I think that the attitude [coming from upper management] of how much it costs is the first question asked instead of what are the benefits versus the resources that will be consumed over the long haul (p. 268).

Their study found that even when management does acknowledge that change is needed to improve accessibility, limited resources are used as a justification to continue operating in traditional ways. Similarly, a staff person in Frisby and Millar's (2002) study felt that dominant managerial values of cost recovery and revenue generation contradicted leisure access work in her department. Frisby and Millar's (2002) and Allison and Hibbler's (2004) studies have both shed light on staff perspectives on the tensions in recreation service provision for diverse communities, but neither examined how staff negotiate these tensions.

2.8 Accountability

Ever since municipal recreation departments shifted towards a neoliberal ideology, there has been an increased value placed on accountability (Frisby et al., 2005). According to Ranson (2003), accountability defines a “relationship of formal control between parties, one of whom is mandatorily held to account to the other for the exercise of roles and stewardship of public resources” (p. 460). It is considered a neoliberal value because of the bureaucratic and hierarchical power relations where one group holds greater power and control and the other is often denied agency (Ranson, 2003). Municipal recreation departments are accountable to the general public because they are primarily funded by citizen tax dollars (McLean, Hurd & Rogers, 2005). Most departments follow a top-down direct approach to service delivery where management makes decisions about policies and programs and input from the public is rarely sought (Frisby et al., 2005). Some argue that accountability measures are put in place to make sure that the interests of the public are being met (Van Slyke & Hammonds, 2003), but Brodie (2005) argues that the ‘terrain of democratic accountability’ is diminished when neoliberalism dominates and the market becomes the main focus.

On the surface, the leisure access policies that staff work with are based on the accountability of municipal recreation departments to serve the diverse needs in their communities (Taylor & Frisby, 2010). Yet, strict eligibility requirements are an example of accountability measures controlling who is eligible for subsidies (Frisby et al., 2005). In the City of Vancouver, citizens are only eligible for leisure access subsidies if their total family income falls below the low income cut-off (LICO) line (VPB, n.d.). In Canada, the LICO line is established based on an income level before taxes at which a

family is likely to spend 20 percent more than the average family on shelter, food, clothing and footwear (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2008). Family size and the size of the community are accounted for in the estimates. This means that if the government estimates a family of four from a city of 600,000 people should be spending 45 percent of their total family income before taxes on essentials, then another family of four from a city of similar size who must spend 65 percent or more to afford those things is considered 'low income'. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (1999):

Statistics Canada has clearly and consistently emphasized, since their publication began over 25 years ago, that the LICOs are quite different from measures of poverty and that this agency does not endorse their use as such. They reflect a consistent and well defined methodology that identifies those who are substantially worse-off than the average. In the absence of an accepted definition of poverty, these statistics have been used by many analysts who wanted to study the characteristics of the relatively worse off families in Canada (p. 6).

LICOs do not necessarily determine one's level of financial need. When municipal recreation departments use the low income cut-off as an eligibility requirement, staff are unable to provide financial assistance to people who are in financial need but are just above the LICO.

Most leisure access policies involve an invasive application procedure where staff require citizens to bring in government documentation, such as their financial assistance records, to prove that their income is below the low income cut off threshold (Frisby et al., 2007). The literature discusses 'proof of poverty' as an accountability measure that departments use to deter people from taking advantage of subsidies (Frisby et al., 2007). Some low income citizens unfortunately choose not to apply because of such application procedures, describing them as humiliating and degrading

(Reid et al., 2002). As a consequence, some staff who demand these requirements are perceived as insensitive (Scott, 2000). Additionally, some recreation departments attempt to limit the number of people who use leisure access by restricting the amount and type of advertising of the policy. Like prove poverty requirements, the literature ties this to a fear that if it were well known that a department offers discounts, people will try to take advantage of them (Frisby et al., 2005). The problem with this is that people who need financial assistance are often unaware that leisure access policies even exist (Frisby et al., 2007), connecting to the value of individualization where the onus is placed on individuals to seek them out. Without widespread outreach, the ability of municipal recreation staff to reach low income citizens is seriously constrained. The literature does not discuss the experiences of staff who must deal with these particular types of situations from their perspectives.

In keeping with the literature's juxtaposition of neoliberalism and social liberal ideology as binary polar opposites, I now consider how the literature connects neoliberalism to masculinity.

2.9 Neoliberalism and Masculinity

Similar to how femininity has been linked to caring work based on women's domestic roles in the family, masculinity has been traditionally linked to the paid work setting because of men's historic role as the family bread winner (McDowell, 2004). Kershaw (2005) argues that men are not economically, politically, or culturally expected to perform a fair share of care work because of historically entrenched gender hierarchies and gender norms regarding men and women's work. In today's work world, masculinity is associated with productivity, efficiency, and business-oriented roles that are considered more economically important (Brush, 1999; Dominelli, 2006).

Organizations operating from a neoliberal stance uphold masculine working skills because they correspond to market-driven goals (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). As Brush (1999) explains, caring for people is feminine work, while ‘making things happen’ characterizes masculine work.

Profit is believed to be the primary motivator in the paid work setting and individualism and competition are highly valued (Reid, 1995; Fletcher, 1999). Pheonix (2003) argues that hierarchical power relationships are another dimension of neoliberalism that is associated with masculinity. As an illustration of this, Reid (1995) contends that decision makers sometimes have difficulty synthesizing their personal values feelings when they have to take a back seat to organizational values and the dictates of the economy. This means that if one’s personal values are more inspired by social liberalism, they may be suppressed if the organization is being driven by masculine neoliberal values.

Section 3: Power Struggles in a Feminized Profession

The gendered hierarchy of men’s and women’s work is a reflection of power relations in organizations (Fletcher, 1999). This final section reviews Rao, Stuart and Kelleher’s (1999) theory of exclusionary power to frame the ways in which values may drive and create tensions in leisure access work.

2.10 Positional Power

Positional power is derived from one’s status or title in an organization (Rao et al., 1999). Men occupy the majority of senior management positions in recreation and sport organizations (Aitchison, 2000; Shaw & Hoeber, 2003), which corresponds to the earlier association made between masculinity and hierarchical power relations in paid work settings (Pheonix, 2003). As Shaw and Hoeber (2003) explain: “It is often

assumed within sport organizations that women are well-matched for lower level management roles, whereas men are more suited to senior management roles” (p. 347). Knights and Kerfoot (2004) characterize senior managers as being “ritually engaged in co-ordinating and controlling others in pursuit of the instrumental goals of production, productivity, and profit” (p.436), illustrating both masculine and neoliberal values.

I am not arguing that neoliberal work is exclusively carried out by men, because women can exhibit these values as well, especially if they want to get ahead in a masculinized work place (McDowell, 2004). Men are also capable of expressing feminine values in their work, although there is less research on this in sports organizations (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003). As men usually dominate senior positions, organization’s standards for success tend to reflect masculine values (Ely, 1995). Consequently, “women who want to succeed in an environment that is dominated by discourses of masculinity must also embrace masculine work practices” (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003, p. 352). This may be problematic for men and women who espouse feminine values tied to social liberalism.

2.11 Agenda-Setting Power

In bureaucracies, positional power is used by top management to dominate organizations and those with positional power are likely to have agenda setting-power as well (Rao et al., 1999). Agenda-setting power means having the authority to decide what is important for an organization, so if senior management does not think certain issues are problematic it is unlikely that they will be addressed (Hoeber, 2007; Rao et al., 1999). Acker (2000) found that upper management were unlikely to support proposed initiatives that countered or threatened the interests of the organization. In

most organizations, new ideas must be championed by a person in high positional power in order to be legitimated for change to occur (Acker, 2000). This means that staff in lower positions of power, like those who do leisure access work, would have to work through others in order to get their concerns onto the agenda. This may be challenging in recreation departments dominated by neoliberal values and a focus on the bottom line, as Davidson Perlmutter and Cnaan (1999) found: “Front-line workers were discouraged from suggesting changes or initiating new ideas as the budget was tight and there was no room for creativity” (p. 62).

Lower level recreation staff in Allison’s study (1999) discussed a frustration with upper management while trying to seek change regarding the department’s approach to ethnic diversity. They described white male administrators in their organizations as being close-minded and not understanding the need for policy change to address organizational barriers to participation for diverse populations, as illustrated in this quotation:

They’re in such a mind set, there are people who have been in a position for a long period of time and they can’t accept new ideas. It’s always been done this way, it works, why change a good thing. For the most part they don’t know if it works for who they are serving, but it works for them (Allison, 1999, p. 90).

This staff person attributed management’s low concern for diversity issues to their privileged upbringings and lack of experience working with minority groups. Attitudes like these create resistance for staff to make leisure access a priority.

2.12 Hidden Power

Hidden power comes into play when individuals who are oppressed accept their positions and do not attempt to advocate for change (Rao et al., 1999). There is evidence to suggest that some women experience oppression in public recreation

departments because their work is more likely to be in lower level roles with little decision making power (Aitchison, 2000). While people in subordinate positions struggle with powerlessness, those in upper management typically work to maintain power (Allison, 1999).

A female athlete in Hoeber's study (2007) exercised hidden power when she admitted having strong opinions about the gender inequalities in an athletic department, but was reluctant to do anything about it because she felt she had no influence and could not provoke change. Similarly, some social workers reported feeling resentful because of their inability to influence change within their organizations (Dominelli, 2006). Social worker's one-on-one engagement with clients and knowledge of clients' needs can be very informative for policy development but, as Dominelli (2006) found, they are rarely consulted during this process. Resentment comes from feeling compelled to implement policies they do not agree with (Dominelli, 2006).

The exercise of hidden power allows certain ideas and values to be accepted as the norm. As Rao and colleagues (1999) explain, the oppressed group perceives that, "It's just the way things are" (p. 7). In public recreation, the danger is that ideologies that are assumed at a senior management and political levels (e.g. city council), but create on-going challenges for leisure access work, continue to dominate without opposition.

2.13 Power of Dialogue

The power of dialogue is linked to positional, agenda-setting, and hidden power by determining whose voices are most likely to be consulted and heard and whose are more likely to be excluded and silenced (Rao et al., 1999). Shaw and Hoeber (2003) would argue that the power of dialogue in sports organizations is connected to the expression of masculine norms. Knights and Kerfoot (2004) would agree, adding that

the dominance of masculine, business-oriented values in organizational processes reduces the space for considering more co-operative and inclusive approaches that are tied to social liberal values.

A way to challenge the dominance of masculinized neoliberal values is for staff to discuss and critique the impact competing values have on their work experiences (Rao et al., 1999). Acker (2000) claims that lower level employees are unlikely to undermine the values or interests of superiors who have the power to fire them and upper management are unlikely to challenge systems that privilege them. As she explains, people in positions of power tend to disregard inequalities and adopt individualistic viewpoints: “one of the privileges enjoyed by those with power is the privilege to not see the systemic sources of privilege” (Acker, 2000, p. 630). My study considered how this type of power, along with positional, agenda-setting and hidden power, affected the ability of municipal recreation staff to go about negotiating social liberal and neoliberal values in leisure access work.

2.14 Summary

Throughout this chapter I have developed arguments as to why some staff who do leisure access work may hold social liberal and/or neoliberal values – due to history, power relations, their career ambitions, the nature of their work, and the nature of the leisure access policy that they must implement. It appears that staff could face a number of challenges while attempting to improve inclusion of citizens living on low incomes, but the literature does not thoroughly examine the values held by staff and their workplaces and how these are negotiated. While I have indicated some of the potential tensions involved in this work through discussions of neoliberalism and Rao et al.’s theory of gender and power, I question the literature that simply dichotomizes

leisure access work as being feminine and social liberal and the work environment as being masculine and neoliberal. By illustrating some of the gaps in the literature, I have developed a case for this study. Next, I discuss the methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I first describe the research site and how municipal recreation staff were recruited as study participants. I then discuss the interviews and focus group methodology and reveal some of the challenges I encountered collecting data. I also discuss data analysis and reflect on my role as a researcher. The chapter ends with a discussion of the ethical issues involved.

3.1 Research Site

3.1.1 'Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation' (VPB). Municipalities typically employ a board of directors to advise city administrators and policy-makers regarding the principles and practices that govern the delivery of recreation services to the public (Searle & Brayley, 1993). Vancouver is an interesting site for my study because, unlike most Canadian cities, the VPB works in partnerships with not-for-profit Community Association Boards (CABs) to deliver community-based recreation (Joint Operating Agreement Task Force, 2004). In the late 1970s, a Joint Operating Agreement Task Force was initiated by the CABs, and supported by the VPB, to help maintain strong partnerships and keep the focus on the recreation needs of Vancouver citizens (Wilson & Morrison, 2003). A financial benefit of this partnership is the charity status that makes CABS eligible for receiving grants from the federal government and private agencies. Many programs depend on such grants to operate.

Collaboratively, the VPB and CABs operate twenty three community centres, nine indoor swimming pools, and eight ice rinks around Vancouver. Community centres are designed to “serve all ages and offer a wide range of resources that focus on

recreational, social, and cultural pursuits” (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, n.d.). Almost every community centre houses a fitness centre and several have an indoor swimming pool and/or ice rink next door. Although each community centre is managed through the VPB-CABs partnership, the nature of the partnership and the division of authority varies from centre to centre. For example, the VPB runs most swimming pools and skating rinks and approximately half of the community centre fitness centres. CABs are in charge of the rest of the pools, skating rinks, and fitness centres, as well as the community centre facilities and all other programs which operate within them (VPB, Fall 2008-Winter, 2009). The VPB is responsible for the overall vision of recreation service delivery in Vancouver, policy development, and the budget, while the CABs are in charge of service delivery, out-reach, and the implementation of VPB policies (Joint Operating Agreement Task Force, 2004).

3.2 Participant Recruitment

I had two main contacts that I worked with to seek approval for the study and to recruit study participants: the Recreation Services Coordinator who is responsible for leisure access services city-wide, and the acting District Manager who is also a Recreation Supervisor. Before obtaining agency approval, I met with them both to discuss the goals of my study in person. I had planned on using a purposive sample (Bryman, 2004), where I would recruit staff across the city who were responsible for leisure access work. The Recreation Services Coordinator clarified that there are not designated staff people for leisure access work, which is what I had assumed coming into this meeting. Leisure access work is actually carried out across the city in different capacities by many different types of employees so I used purposive sampling to recruit staff from different positions. Since I thought that leisure access work was commonly a

responsibility of Community Recreation Supervisors, I came to this meeting with a list of community centres and the names of corresponding supervisors located on the city websites. The coordinator and manager reviewed my list and began editing it according to the people they thought I should speak with. While a benefit of working with gatekeepers is to identify potential study participants (Amis, 2005), I had some concerns about this process as revealed in my following field note excerpt.

At this time I was getting a little nervous and concerned that they were selecting people based on what they wanted to show of their leisure access program (well-received and supported by staff), so I mentioned this and they understood that I wanted more of a 'random sample'. [The manager] said this would make it easier for them actually because now they won't put so much effort into choosing the 'right' person. So, they picked people quite quickly but they certainly were people they both seemed to know well and would often go, "oh yeah, he/she would be great", or "oh, how about so-and-so". (field notes, July 16th, 2009)

I was worried that they had their own selection criteria that would create a biased sample, but without their help I would have had difficulty knowing who to talk to. The gatekeepers provided me with names of 19 people who are regularly involved in leisure access work and are from a variety of positions across the city.

Once I began the interviews, I was able to recruit more people to the study through a snowballing technique by contacting other staff the interviewees suggested. In two cases I was directed to other staff in the building who made time that same day to be interviewed. In one case, I had scheduled interviews with two people from the same centre on the same day and once they realized this, they requested to be interviewed together. When I got there, they invited a third staff person to join in. Although I was already nervous about interviewing two people at once, I am very glad that I did not deter the third person from joining because she had a lot of experience in

leisure access work and added an interesting perspective. The snowballing technique proved very fruitful because within the span of two months I managed to interview 20 people, eight of whom were not on the original list from the gatekeepers. All of the participants received an information sheet and consent form via email that outlined the purpose and goals of the study (see Appendix A). Each participant signed a consent form prior to participating in an interview, either in person or sent to me via fax.

Table 3.1 lists all of the participants with their chosen pseudonyms, job titles, gender, where they worked, self-defined ethnicity, numbers of years they have been working in municipal recreation, and their involvement in the focus groups. A limitation of the study was that I did not ask interviewees to fill out a short biographical survey that asked about their socio-economic status, education, and other background information. However, I contacted them via email after the interviews and asked them to provide their self-identified ethnicity. The participants, 14 of which were female and six were male, were ethnically diverse, although Table 3.1 does not show the extent of this because some staff chose to simply define themselves as 'Canadian'. The 20 interviewees were not a uniform sample as they held a variety of job titles, worked in different neighbourhoods in Vancouver, and their work experience ranged from 7-40 years. It was important to interview people from different jurisdictions because socioeconomic status varies greatly across Vancouver neighbourhoods, with the East side reflecting lower levels of income.

Recruiting for the focus groups was much easier because I simply asked each interviewee if this was something they were interested in at the end of each interview.

Table 3.1 Participants

	Chosen pseudonym	Job title and status -full-time (FT) or part-time (PT)	Jurisdiction	Gender	Self-defined ethnicity	Years working in municipal recreation	Participated in a focus group (FG)
1	Louise	Recreation Services Coordinator Access Services (FT)	City wide	F	Caucasian	23	FG #1
2	Rose	Program Assistant – LAC (PT)	City wide	F	South Asian/Indo Canadian	11	FG #2
3	Bert	Director of Aquatics (FT)	City wide	M	Caucasian Canadian	25	FG #1
4	Alexia	Recreation Facility Clerk (FT)	West end	F	Greek-Canadian	12	No
5	Heather	Supervisor (FT)	West end	F	Eastern European - Caucasian	33	FG #1
6	Lance	Recreation Supervisor/ Acting District Manager (FT)	West end	M	Caucasian	35	FG #2
7	Shannon	Recreation Facility Clerk (FT)	East side	F	Caucasian	21	FG #1
8	Lucy	Recreation Programmer (PT)	East side	F	Caucasian Canadian	22	No
9	*David	Cashier (PT)	East side	M	n/a	9	No
10	Karla	Head Lifeguard (FT)	East side	F	Canadian	20	FG #2
11	Rebecca	Cashier (PT)	East side	F	Samoan	9	No
12	Sharmaine	Recreation Facility Clerk (FT)	East side	F	Chinese Canadian	20	FG #2
13	Ann	Recreation Programmer (FT)	East side	F	Caucasian Canadian	19	No
14	Agnes	Cashier (PT)	East side	F	Canadian Caucasian	7	No
15	Bunny	Recreation Supervisor (FT)	East side	M	Caucasoid Canadian	30	FG #2
16	Charlie	Recreation Supervisor (FT)	West side	M	Caucasian	40	No
17	Monique	Head Cashier (FT)	West side	F	Canadian	14	FG #1
18	Linda	Recreation Facility Clerk (FT)	West side	F	Canadian	19	FG #2
19	Ron	Recreation Programmer (FT)	Downtown eastside	M	Japanese Canadian	35	FG #2
20	Josee	Programmer (FT)	Downtown eastside	F	Canadian	29	No

*Participant number nine resigned shortly following the interview, before the focus groups took place. He no longer had access to the VPB email address through which I was communicating with him so I received no response to the pseudonym and other questions I asked. I chose his pseudonym for him. Two other staff people preferred to have their real name used.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Multiple methods. Using more than one method is one way qualitative researchers pursue an in-depth understanding of research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I used semi-structured interviews, followed by two focus groups, along with an analysis of relevant documents and field notes. Although my primary rationale for following up interviews with focus groups was to review my interpretations and analyses with study participants, in some cases the interviews and focus groups yielded different information. In particular, staff had a number of recommendations for change that were discussed in more depth in the focus groups. Details of each methodology are described below.

3.3.2 Interviews. Interviews facilitate a deep exploration of issues in ways that other methodologies do not (Amis, 2005), and they allow the researcher to learn how people make sense of their experiences (Chase, 2003). I started each interview with a review of the purpose of the study and ethical guidelines and explained the reasons I was requesting to tape-record the interview. The in-person interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes to one hour, depending on the time the person had available. My interview with Ron lasted for almost two hours and my telephone interviews with Lance and Charlie were half an hour each. I tested my interview questions in a pilot-interview with two recreation staff who worked in the Leisure Access Card office where a city-wide policy is managed and have included these two people as participants in the study. My interview guide was refined given their feedback. For example, I originally asked what values underpinned leisure access work, but I learned in the pilot that the term “value” was too vague and confused people as they thought I was talking about

the value of participating in recreation. As a result, I re-worded my questions to emphasize that I was interested in their work (see Appendix B).

I used a semi-structured format but also remained flexible so we could discuss new issues that came up (Bryman, 2004; Hakim, 2000). The first question I asked was how the interviewee became involved in municipal recreation. Those responses usually ended with a description of their current job position and their involvement in leisure access work, which most often led directly into a discussion of the challenges in this work. I used a probing technique, as recommended by Bryman (2004), to follow up on new issues that came up by asking questions like, “What do you mean by that?” and “Could you talk about that a little more?” I tried to let the interviews flow naturally like a conversation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), referring to my interview guide occasionally to make sure I covered the interview questions.

The literature warns of potential problems that may occur while conducting interviews (Bryman, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and I would like to divulge a couple difficulties I had because they provide context to the findings. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge and discuss challenges so that others researchers, particularly new researchers like myself, may learn from them. First of all, trying to schedule interviews with staff was a difficult task but it gave me insight into how busy their jobs are. Trying to schedule with one particular person caused me a lot of frustration because she did not reply to my initial email, was rarely in the building when I phoned, and did not respond to my messages. This was the only contact I had for a particular neighbourhood that I really wanted representation from, so I tried several times to reach this person. When I finally got her on the phone, unlike most of the other

staff, she did not sound excited about my study. She said she did not have much time to spare to speak to me because she was very busy. Just as we were ending the conversation, the person said that Monday morning would work. Grateful that she had finally agreed, I said I would be there, forgetting that I work Monday mornings. I rearranged my schedule and arrived 10 minutes early for the interview. I could see through a window that the individual was in a meeting so I asked the front desk person when the meeting was expected to be finished. I wrote about this in my field notes:

... she said it should be done by 12pm. My interview was scheduled for 11am. I'm a little [disappointed] since I rushed down here and rearranged my schedule. I have to do my best to stay calm but if this meeting goes much later than 12pm it will be hard not to [let the participant know how upset I am] (August 10th, 2010).

When the meeting ended at 11:45am and the staff person sat down with me, I quickly realized this interview was well worth waiting for. Because of her knowledge, the issues she deals with in this particular low income neighbourhood, and the unique approach she takes to her work, this ended up being a fascinating interview. As a result, I am very glad that I persisted in my quest for the interview and that the staff person eventually agreed to participate.

A second difficulty I encountered was a result of the coordinator sending the first email out about my study, because several people then thought my study was linked to the VPB. Some even thought I was conducting a review of the department's Leisure Access Card policy on behalf of the VPB. Consequently, I spent time at the beginning of each interview reiterating that the study was my master's thesis project from UBC that was not associated with the VPB. Several people expressed disappointment with this because they thought the organization was looking to improve the current policy,

something they felt was needed. As a consolation, I told them that I intended to submit a summary report to the VPB that would include a list of recommendations from staff for the improvements in leisure access work. While this seemed to make most staff quite pleased, I then felt pressured to deliver a report that would instigate change at an organizational level, something that was beyond the goals of the study. It is possible, however, that my report will influence VPB management to consider some of the challenges discussed by staff.

The final difficulty pertained to telephone interviews. It is preferable to conduct interviews in person because it is easier to develop rapport and allows the researcher to consider non-verbal communication in the analysis, such as body language and facial expressions (Amis, 2005; Neuman, 1997). However, during my timeframe, Lance and Charlie were only available for telephone interviews. Consequently, these interviews felt more structured to me and less like a natural conversation. Also, Lance and Charlie had both read over the interview guide that I had sent them and appeared to be referencing it during the interview. While Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that a more accurate perspective is provided when participants have had the chance to reflect on the issues and formulate opinions, going off topic and 'rambling' is encouraged in qualitative interviewing because it indicates what interviewees feel are important within the topics being discussed (Bryman, 2004). Since Lance and Charlie mostly stuck to the outlined questions and rarely spoke off topic, I wonder whether or not the interviews covered what they felt was most important.

3.3.3 Focus groups. Focus groups are an effective data collection strategy when examining how multiple interpretations on the same topic are negotiated because the stimulating and dynamic environment that is often created invites participants to challenge, agree with, and build upon one another's opinions (Amis, 2005; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003). They also allow participants to review, validate, and modify their own viewpoints which increases the likelihood of a more realistic account of people's thoughts and experiences (Bryman, 2004b). I used the focus group methodology to review my interpretations, validate dominant themes that emerged from the interviews, and seek clarifications in areas I still had questions. I also wanted to bring staff together to discuss their work as a group because they rarely have that opportunity and all but one interviewee expressed interest in attending a focus group. David was the exception because he was terminating his work for the VPB shortly after the interview. As the following comment from Karla shows, the rare opportunity to discuss their work among colleagues was appreciated:

[It is] sort of like you're coming in from a perspective that, you're coming in to help us bring it up as a discussion piece. That's even, just bringing this group together to me is amazing because I don't know if I've ever been in a group to even talk about anything! As in policy-wise, you know, to be given the opportunity to talk about it and be taken seriously about it. So it's appreciated. (focus group)

The high interest in continuing the conversation about leisure access work signaled to me that staff were passionate about their work and want their voices to be heard.

With the coordinator's help, two separate focus groups were arranged two days apart, both scheduled for two hours at a centrally located Vancouver community centre. I wanted to offer some variety in times to accommodate staff schedules and having potentially nineteen participants was too many to give everyone a voice in one focus

group. Eight staff people were scheduled to attend the first focus group, plus myself and my supervisor, who was there as an observer to support me as I had not done a focus group before. On the day of the group, however, three people could not attend. One person had a family emergency, another person could not find childcare, and the third person got too busy with work. Eight staff people were also scheduled to attend the second focus group and one person could not make it due to an illness. My supervisor did not attend this meeting. Table 3.1 above indicates who attended each focus group.

Both focus groups began with introductions, as not all staff knew one another. I verbally presented the goals of the focus group and went over guidelines, which are listed along with the focus group guide (see Appendix C). Next, I verbally introduced themes that stood out in the interviews and looked for validation by asking if my identification of them was accurate and if people had different or additional thoughts to add, which they most often did. I also asked staff to elaborate on a few topics that I labeled “dilemmas” because I had contradictory data from interviews, such as the conceptualization of rights and privileges to leisure access. This allowed me to develop a greater understanding of different perspectives on this work. The latter half of the meeting was devoted to discussing recommendations for the improvement of leisure access work because this is what staff seemed most eager to discuss. I used a flipchart to record their ideas.

In terms of potential problems with focus groups, the most significant issue, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006), is sorting out power dynamics within the group. The researcher is said to be in a power position to facilitate the conversation but has less control than in a one-on-one interview because there are several people

participating (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I did my best to make sure that everyone had a chance to speak, but as Fontana and Frey (2005) discuss, some participants tend to overpower the conversation while others refrain from saying much at all. In both focus groups, I found that power dynamics were closely linked to the positional power of staff in the organization, with staff in higher positions of power talking more. For example, in the second group, the two supervisors often had the last word regarding recommendations and whether or not they would be accepted at a decision-making level. In the first focus group, staff tended to defer to what the Recreation Services Coordinator thought. Several times the front desk staff people directed their own questions at her by asking whether or not she was happy with the current Leisure Access policy. Although I felt slightly uncomfortable that she was being put in the 'hot seat', it was interesting to observe this interaction because it seemed to signal a few things: 1) lower level staff wanted opportunities to ask questions, 2) lower level staff wanted to know how likely it would be for change to occur, and 3) the coordinators ideas and inside knowledge were important because she was in a position to influence change.

Power dynamics also seemed to influence some people's participation in the focus groups when their bosses were present. I tried to organize the focus groups so this would not happen, but in a few cases it was unavoidable. Since they work in separate buildings, I actually did not realize that Bert was Shannon's boss when I asked them both to attend the first focus group. It was not until Shannon made the following comment that I realized what their working relationship was:

It is rewarding for me if I know that, yes, that person needs it, yes, that person doesn't have 100% of the required documents. And that's when the common

sense kicks in. Sorry, I know he's the boss (referring to Bert)... but I had it many times when I didn't have, like they haven't presented 100% of required documents. (focus group)

Shannon admitted here, in front of her boss, that she does not always follow the rules that state patrons must present all necessary documents before receiving a subsidy. While in this case the power dynamic did not appear to affect Shannon's honesty or comfort level in discussing her work, it could have been an influence at other times and among other people.

In a paper about conducting qualitative research, Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2003) concluded that focus groups differed from interviews when it came to how people expressed optimism or pessimism about the future. They argue that researchers should not see one type types of data as being "more true than the other" (p.200), but should theorize why the responses took different forms. An example of this occurred in my study, when a front desk person seemed to completely change from a pessimistic outlook in the interviews based on having to deal with people they believed were taking advantage of the leisure access policy, to a much more positive view when they discussed their work in front of their colleagues. The literature suggests that as participants listen to one another's responses, they sometimes develop different viewpoints (Amis, 2005; Bryman, 2004b), but power dynamics may have been a strong influence in this case because two of the individual's supervisors were present. Furthermore, Henn, Weinsten and Foard (2006) argue that when participants are asked about the organizations in which they work, they may feel obliged to answer in a positive way. The influence of power dynamics calls into question whether or not the person purposely changed their perspective to create a favourable impression their

supervisors. The focus groups were helpful in gaining further insights into how power dynamics are operating in the workplace.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes, which were taken as soon as possible after the interviews and focus groups to capture my initial thoughts and analyses, were also typed up. All of this data was entered into Weft QDA, a qualitative data analysis computer software package that allows researchers to categorize segments of data into themes and sub-themes. A multitude of categories developed from both inductive and deductive analysis. A goal of this study was to allow research findings to emerge from the data by picking up on what the staff had to say, which is an inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). I read each transcript several times and looked for recurrent patterns as well as contradictions and inconsistencies in the data (Thomas, 2006; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

For the deductive portion of my analysis, I read through the transcripts and looked specifically for evidence of the social liberal and neoliberal values that I had identified in the literature review. Since social liberal values are interrelated, I sometimes found it difficult to decide how to code each one. For example, engaging in dialogue with excluded groups is talked about in the literature on social inclusion (Shookner, 2002), but it has also been linked conceptually to community development (Ife, 2003). I decided to include it under social inclusion because the literature describes it as one of the distinctive dimensions of recreation inclusion, whereas the literature on community development puts more emphasis on organizing and mobilizing communities for collective action (Lawson, 2005). Deductive and inductive analyses are

illustrated in my codebook (see Appendix D), which was organized in relation to the three research questions with the headings 'master code', 'subcode, and 'descriptive codes'. Master code is a title for broad topics, subcodes represent themes within these topics, and descriptive codes provide examples from the data (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004).

Although I had some experience with data analysis, working with my own data was not a simple or easy task. As Sipe and Ghiso (2004) admit, "the intricacies and messiness of the process are a bit lost in the retelling, making the problems appear orderly and easily resolved" (p.479). I grappled with the data over a period of four months, constantly grouping and re-grouping themes and categories. Data analysis is not a neutral process (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003); it is influenced by the epistemological and theoretical assumptions of the researcher as Mello (2002) explains below.

Of course, information, conclusions, and findings do not actually emerge on their own, like a mist rising from a lake of data bites; instead, they are part of the researcher's intuitive/cognitive perception and emanate from serious attempts to manipulate, explore, and organize sets of data. As such, the way we create meaning is both creative as well as analytical (p. 235).

I am aware that I constructed codes and themes based on my personal interpretations of the data and understanding of the literature (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004), and that another researcher may have organized my data quite differently. This was based, in part, on my social location that is discussed in the next section.

3.5 Positioning Myself in the Research

Social positions, ambitions, access to resources, experiences, and political loyalties guide one's interpretation and analysis of other people's experiences (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). As Sipe and Ghiso (2004) contend: "unpacking our positioning makes clear the lenses we are drawing on as we grapple with our data and

relate to participants” (p.474). It is important to consider how my identity affected the study. I am a white, female, heterosexual, middle-class, fitness enthusiast, and former elite athlete. I was 25 years old at the time of this study, quite a bit younger than most of the study participants. Some of the staff had participated in previous studies by UBC researchers, but for many it was a novel experience. It is possible that some staff thought of me as a young, inexperienced researcher, although no one made me feel inadequate or insecure about my age or experience.

I have worked in private fitness centres as a personal trainer, fitness instructor, and front desk staff person. I have taught fitness classes in one Vancouver community centre, but I have no other work experience in municipal recreation. This would have given me ‘outsider status’ among some of the municipal recreation staff in this study. Insider/outsider are not fixed positions, they are constantly shifting and are experienced and expressed differently in each researcher-participant relationship (Naples, 2003). Qualitative researchers who advocate ‘insider’ research believe that outsiders may not be able to gain as thorough an understanding of the cultural practices and beliefs of their participants like an insider would (Naples, 2003), but I argue that two experiences helped me understand the context of my study better.

While on a HKIN 598 field placement at the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA), I worked on a province-wide initiative designed to improve access to public recreation for people living on low incomes. Over a two-month period, I talked to various recreation leaders around the province about the programs they were running. I also had the opportunity to meet several leaders in recreation and leisure access from the Greater Vancouver area at a two-day Multiculturalism and Physical

Activity Workshop in February, 2009. I believe that my experience at the BCRPA and the two-day workshop gave me access to some information about the experience of doing leisure access work that helped me identify with my research participants, potentially reducing their perception of me as a complete outsider. I am aware that one cannot abandon their social location (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), but I attempted to read the transcripts without prejudice and group the data into themes based on what I understood to be the study participants' perspectives. I made a point of reading over my interpretations of the data to look for areas where I may have altered participants' dialogues based on my own perspectives on the topic (Fine, et al., 2003). I did this by asking the question: "Is that what they really meant by that comment or is that what I wanted them to mean?" I made adjustments accordingly and, in the end, I feel confident that my analysis reflects the various perspectives of leisure access work encountered in my research.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from Research Services at the University of British Columbia. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the right to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any point in time. I explained that interview data was confidential, pseudonyms would be used in my written work, and I would not name the recreation facilities staff worked in. Maintaining confidentiality is sometimes difficult in qualitative research because pseudonyms do not entirely eliminate the possibility of identification (Bryman, 2006c). For example, it may be possible for staff who read my written work to guess their co-workers' identities based on the comments they made and the information I provide in Table 3.1, such as job

titles, jurisdictions, gender and ethnicity. This could be problematic if staff or management take offence to or strongly disagree with their co-workers' responses. Next I describe a confidentiality incident that occurred following a focus group that illustrates the implications of the power dynamics involved.

33.6.1 Confidentiality incident. The study consent forms were signed prior to the interviews. For most interviewees, there was a two month lapse between their interview and the focus groups, so the confidentiality agreement may not have been fresh in their minds at the time of the focus groups. While I had taken the time to review the goals of the study and go over guidelines for focus group discussions, I did not reiterate the ethical concerns that were outlined in the consent form.

Shortly after the focus groups, I received a phone call from an individual who manages a community centre and who had been interviewed but had not attended a focus group. He heard from his front desk staff person who attended one of the focus groups that a lot of attention was being given to a story where someone who appeared to be taking advantage of leisure access subsidies was actually living in a luxury car and really needed help. He told me that upon hearing this, he phoned the staff person (whom the front desk staff said had told the story) and confronted him for giving me a false impression of the reality in leisure access work. He called the luxury car story an "extreme exception" in comparison to hundreds of people who take advantage of the system on a daily basis. This comment about 'abusing' subsidies is a common one and reflects a neo-liberal ideology because it is considered inappropriate for 'paying middle class customers' to get a subsidized rate that will lower revenues (Taylor & Frisby, 2010). At the time of my study, the issue of system abuse was not being acknowledged

or sufficiently addressed according to many staff. The person who phoned me was ultimately concerned that the summary report I would be submitting to the VPB would not describe abuse as a main challenge. While this incident illustrates how power can be exercised by some people to try and control the publication of study findings (Bryman, 2004c), it also shows the passion that some staff put into their work as it was very important to him that my study discuss the challenges he felt were the most prominent in this work.

This disclosure reflects my inexperience as an academic researcher, but this incident may have occurred whether or not I had re-emphasized confidentiality. I decided to include the example in this chapter as it serves as an important lesson for future researchers. It can be challenging to maintain confidentiality when conducting focus groups with staff from different positions of power within an organization. In future, it is advisable to explain that confidentiality is not possible in a focus group setting and that participants could be asked to contact the researcher after the focus group if there is anything else they would like to discuss in confidence. The focus groups did provide a forum for staff and managers to talk about ideas for dealing with some of the challenges associated with leisure access work. In the next chapter, my findings are presented.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, I describe and analyze the values underpinning leisure access work based on my interviews and focus groups with twenty municipal recreation staff in the City of Vancouver. I found both social liberal and neoliberal values reflected in this work, and the majority of challenges were tied to neoliberalism. Surprisingly, I found some evidence of these two typically opposing ideologies co-existing and complementing one another. That is, there were times when neoliberal values helped staff work towards social justice mandates. Gender and power are key factors in this study as leisure access work is arguably feminized and done by staff in lower positions of power.

I begin this chapter with some pertinent background information and then discuss the findings in relation to my three research questions: (i) how are social liberal and neoliberal values reflected in leisure access work, (ii) what are the major challenges in leisure access work and how are they connected to social liberal and neoliberal ideologies, and (iii) how do municipal recreation staff negotiate the major challenges in leisure access work? There are two sections in this chapter with section one being dedicated to the first research question and section two being dedicated to the second and third research questions. The reason I have combined the last two research questions is because I found that while discussing the challenges in their work, staff also discussed how they negotiate these challenges. The chapter ends with participant recommendations for improving this work.

4.1 Background

4.1.1 'Leisure Access Card'. It is important to begin this chapter with a thorough explanation of the Leisure Access Card (LAC) policy because implementing it is integral to leisure access work. The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (VPB) offers the LAC for Vancouver residents who are living on low incomes. The card allows residents access to city swimming pools and skating rinks at no cost during open public hours, rent skates for free, purchase swimming lessons at half price, receive a 50% discount on the use of municipal fitness centres, and receive discounts on admissions to various recreation venues around the city (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, n.d.b). Vancouver issues approximately 18,000 LACs every year. The card does not extend to transportation, childcare, or other commonly identified barriers to participation for low income citizens (Reid et al., 2002).

The LAC policy requires staff to ask citizens to Vancouver demonstrate their low income, or 'prove poverty' as Frisby, Reid and Ponc (2007) describe it, by submitting a number of private documents. Families must fill out a low income application form or bring in a signed form from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development if they are receiving social assistance. Senior citizens who receive social assistance can receive the LAC after showing a staff person their subsidized bus pass and photo ID. While this is common practice in leisure access work in large Canadian cities (Taylor & Frisby, 2010), having to prove poverty is a humiliating process for many and it has been criticized for being an invasion of privacy (Reid 2004).

It is important to note how the term 'total family income' is defined by the low income cut-off regulations because it requires adding up the combined income from all

family members related by blood, common law, adoption or marriage, regardless of age, who are contributing to a Vancouver household. Separate living areas do not count as a separate household (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, n.d.b.). As Louise explained,

Even though they live in a household with their grandparents living upstairs, their brother living in another suite, they're in a basement suite, all living completely separate... they have their own little space, they don't interact with the family on an everyday basis. We still, as part of our policy, it's 'total family'. (interview)

The problem with this policy is that additional income from relatives residing in the same house can increase the total family income above the low income cut-off point. Staff in the LAC office have access to municipal housing information and, as part of their jobs, they must verify the number of residents compared with the number of notices of assessments submitted with low income applications. In the commonly occurring situation that Louise describes, the policy requires staff to deny eligibility for the LAC.

Individual community centres, guided by their Community Association Boards (CABs), have the authority to decide whether or not to adopt the LAC policy and its associated application process. Most Vancouver community centres have, but there are two centres that have not (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, Fall 2008-Winter 2009). Community centres can offer additional subsidies, as some community members may need further financial aid than what is provided with the LAC. They may also implement their own leisure access policies for recreation programs run exclusively by the CABs, such as for yoga, martial arts, and sport leagues, to which the LAC does not apply.

4.1.2 Leisure access work varies. Just as the implementation of the LAC varies across the city, so does the nature of leisure access work. For Rose and Louise, who work in the LAC office, leisure access work means approving and processing applications. For front desk staff in community centres and pools it often means providing LAC applications to the public, sending completed applications to the LAC office, and issuing LACs by taking photos and printing cards. For programmers and supervisors, who have many responsibilities in addition to leisure access work, it involves overseeing the implementation of the policy and addressing concerns from front desk staff and patrons. Some staff work with additional leisure access initiatives that their centre has chosen to offer, like loonie/toonie swims, free use of fitness centres, or low cost/free organized sports for kids. For a few staff, leisure access work extends to addressing some of the cross-cutting issues that accompany poverty, such as offering a shower program, a breakfast program, after school childcare, or helping people find housing and employment.

4.1.3 Socio-economic status of Vancouver neighbourhoods. The socio-economic status of the neighbourhood is a primary determinant for what leisure access work resembles at a community centre. While subsidized housing does exist across the city, neighbourhoods on the Eastside of Vancouver are of lower socioeconomic status, particularly the Downtown Eastside that is known as the poorest postal code in Canada (Eby, 2007). The Westside and West End are generally higher income neighbourhoods. It is inaccurate, however, to assume that only the centres in the poorest areas are active in leisure access work and in addressing the social issues attached to poverty, because there were examples of this work being done all around the city.

Remembering the economic diversity in Vancouver and noting the community in which each staff person works is important in analyzing the data, but the values that guided individual approaches to the work had a major influence as well.

Section 1: How Social Liberal and Neoliberal Values are Reflected in This Work

People get involved in leisure access work for a number of different reasons and not always because they are passionate about providing recreation opportunities for people living on low incomes. For some, particularly but not exclusively front desk staff, it is simply a job that leads to a paycheque. In contrast, other staff will, as Bunny put it, “trip over themselves” to provide leisure access assistance. The result is a variety of approaches that cannot always be confined to one set of values or particular ideology. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the data analysis where I categorized the data according to social liberal and neoliberal values and highlights the diversity in participants’ responses. An ‘X’ is used to signify the staff people who either sensed the values in their co-workers approach to leisure access work or as part of a broader departmental or political ideology. A ‘Y’ indicates those who were personally guided by a value, talking about it when describing their own approach to work. A money symbol (\$) is next to supervisors and programmers who discussed balancing a budget as part of their job duties, which was recognized as a significant factor in the analysis. Following Table 4.1, I highlight some of the patterns in the data and explain how I see each one connecting to the social liberal values of social justice, social inclusion, community development, an ethic of care, and a new value I called ‘policy flexibility’, as well as to the neoliberal values of individualization, efficiency, and accountability.

Table 4.1 – Social liberal and neoliberal values in leisure access work

PARTICIPANT PSUEDONYMS			Social Liberal Values				Neoliberal Values			
			Social justice	Social inclusion	Community development	Ethic of care	Policy Flexibility	Individuali- zation	Efficiency	Account- ability
1	Louise	\$	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y X	X	Y X	X
2	Rose		Y	Y				X	X	Y X
3	Bert	\$	Y	Y				X	Y X	
4	Alexia		X	Y		X	Y	Y	Y X	X
5	Heather	\$	Y	Y		Y	Y		Y X	X
6	Lance	\$	Y	Y				X	Y X	
7	Shannon		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y X	X	X
8	Lucy	\$	Y	Y		Y	Y	X	Y X	X
9	David		X					Y	Y X	Y
10	Karla		Y					X	Y X	Y
11	Rebecca		Y	Y		Y	Y			
12	Sharmaine		X	X		X		Y	X	X
13	Ann	\$	Y X	Y X	Y X	X	Y X	X	Y X	Y X
14	Agnes		Y X	Y X	X	Y	X			
15	Charlie	\$	Y	X			X	Y	Y X	Y
16	Monique		Y			Y	Y	Y	Y X	X
17	Linda		Y	Y	X	Y	Y	X	X	
18	Bunny	\$	Y	X		X	Y	X	Y X	Y X
19	Ron	\$	Y X	Y X	Y X	Y X	Y X		X	
20	Josee		Y X	Y X	Y X	Y X	Y X			

\$ = Discussed having financial responsibilities

Y = Values that guided their personal approach to this work

X = Values in their workplace (sensed in their co-workers approach to this work or as part of a broader departmental or political ideology)

Y X = congruency between personal and workplace values

As illustrated in Table 4.1, the work of most staff in this study was affected by both social liberal and neoliberal values and twelve staff were personally guided by both ideologies. Eighteen staff were personally guided by at least one social liberal value in their approach to leisure access work (as indicated by Y). Three were personally guided by all five values of social justice, social inclusion, community development, an ethic of care, and policy flexibility. Two were not personally guided by any. Eleven staff saw at least one social liberal value operating in their workplace in a way that affected their work (as indicated by X). Fourteen staff were personally guided by at least one neoliberal value in their approach to this work and two were guided by all three values of individualization, efficiency, and accountability. Seventeen staff described a neoliberal value operating in their workplace, affecting their work, and three did not discuss neoliberal values affecting their work. For some there was value congruency when they identified a particular value as being one that drove their workplace that was also held personally (which is apparent when both X and Y appear under a value in Table 4.1). In many instances, there was value incongruence when personal values were not aligned with workplace values, and this was most evident when staff reported personal work values related to social liberalism and a workplace dominated by neoliberal values. However, workplaces were sometimes described as operating from social liberal values which suggests that the two sets of values co-exist. This is a brief outline of some of the broad patterns I found in the data that are discussed in further detail in this chapter.

4.2 Social Liberal Values

4.2.1 Social justice. Seventeen staff were personally guided by social justice and seven saw it operating in their workplace. Of those people, four felt there was value congruence between their personal approach and what was being promoted in their workplace. Advocates of social justice argue that governments should be responsible for the distribution of resources with a particular emphasis on helping those disadvantaged by the economic market (Barry, 2005). This was expressed by those who espoused social justice values in this study:

I don't think there should be any limitations to people. I mean if we're going to provide the facilities, the tax payers providing the facilities, it should be available to everybody regardless. Otherwise, what's the point? (Linda, interview)

This quote speaks to the social justice role that many staff believe municipal recreation should fill in their communities. Social justice is based on an acceptance of difference and diversity and is about achieving fairness and equity, by recognizing people's dignity and meeting basic needs (Craig, 2002). The following is an example of how this value was expressed in this work: "People need to be treated with respect no matter what their situation is. We want to maintain people's dignity. We do not want them to feel as if they're on the witness stand (Lance, interview). Like recreation staff in Scott's (2008) study, over half the staff in my study stressed the importance of being non judgmental in order for services to be welcoming to a variety of people.

A persistent finding was that meeting perceived needs in their communities, a dimension of social justice work, was what drives the work of many recreation staff, as this quote demonstrates:

Our programming is definitely defined by the needs of our community, that's why we're called a community centre. Everything we do is reflective upon the

interests and needs of our community. And if the needs of our community is no money, it means that we provide the programs that cost no money. (Ron, interview)

This is an example of value congruency where social justice was a personal work value and a value operating in the workplace as Ron discussed how the leisure access philosophy in his community centre was based on meeting needs. Ten people discussed striving to meet needs in interviews and it was further emphasized in focus group discussions. As an example, when I asked staff in the first focus group about the challenges of doing leisure access work, they automatically spoke about the barriers to recreation faced by people in their communities. I had to remind them that my study was about the challenges of doing the *work* to include those people, not the challenges faced by low-income populations per se.

4.2.2 Social inclusion. Fourteen staff were personally guided by social inclusion and seven saw it operating in their work environment. Four of those people felt there was value congruence between their personal approach and their workplace. Acknowledging and attempting to address barriers to recreation was the most common evidence that social inclusion was guiding their work. Direct engagement with excluded groups to learn how policies and programs can be improved was another indicator (Shookner, 2002). One example of this came from Heather who developed a program where children from a low income neighbourhood are transported to an aquatic centre for swimming lessons, cared for by recreation staff, and then returned home, at little or no financial cost to parents. She explained her rationale for developing this program.

The mother with the 2 kids and she wants to take the child to swimming lessons, so she takes the 2 kids, one's in the stroller, the other's by hand. She goes to the bus, she waits for the bus, she gets onto the bus, she gets to the swimming pool, she gets off the bus, she changes the one child, while she's trying to take care of

the other one. Child has their half an hour swimming lesson and they get changed again, get out of the facility, go wait for the bus, and then they go home again. It isn't going to happen, right? Like, that is just way too much energy for a half hour lesson! (focus group)

Heather became aware of these barriers to inclusion by talking to low income mothers.

This example shows how some staff who are personally guided by social inclusion values recognize that simply 'opening the doors' does not guarantee that citizens will be able to participate in recreation (Ponic, 2007).

Another dimension of social inclusion is honouring citizenship rights (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). Seven staff discussed recreation as a right of citizenship and used that claim as leverage for arguing that leisure access is important. Charlie provided an example of this when he said, "I think people have a right to leisure. We should have a format in place to help those who need help" (interview). Underlying this argument is a belief that participation leads to various physical, mental and social benefits; something that Scott (2008) claims is a fundamental reason why staff enter the field of recreation. This belief was also an influence on those staff who espoused the value of community development.

4.2.3 Community development. Community development focuses on organizing and mobilizing whole communities for collective action and puts citizens at the heart of decision-making processes (Davidson Perlmutter & Cnaan, 1999; Lawson, 2005). Although municipal recreation has been called an ideal site for community development (Frisby et al., 2005), only four staff were personally driven by the value and five detected it in their workplaces. Of those people, three discussed value congruency in personal approaches and their workplaces, and each of these people do work with low income communities including the Downtown Eastside. In these

neighbourhoods, ideas are often championed by the community as Ann described in her interview: “They are the ones that communicate to us what they want.” One of these centres even calls themselves a co-operative instead of a community centre to signify their dedication to collective action.

Another dimension of community development is drawing on resources within the community to address needs and interests (Ife, 2003). Linda provided an illustration of this as she described a weekly shower program for homeless people in her West Side neighbourhood.

I think it was one of the volunteers from the community that approached us and it was something the Board wanted to do. A really good group of volunteers and they bring in nurses every once in a while, haircuts, they've had a dentist in, so they get various things. And we get donations - winter clothes, boots, there are some ladies that knit socks. We ask for donations periodically for towels, bedding in the winter, warm jackets, hoodies, you know that kind of stuff. (interview)

A reason that initiatives like these are rare in Vancouver is in part due to the dominance of a neoliberal top-down approach to service delivery that remains prevalent in municipal recreation departments (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Frisby et al., 2007).

Another reason is that providing these types of social services is seen as going beyond the mandates of recreation departments in local government (Taylor & Frisby, 2010).

The six staff who discussed community development were also the same staff who claimed that all five social liberal values affected their work. Only two of these staff personally guided by neoliberal values of efficiency and accountability, but this was likely connected to their job responsibilities of balancing budgets. This caused them to struggle while negotiating their social liberal values in a neoliberal work environment.

The other four staff were not personally driven by neoliberal values, and two did not

discuss neoliberalism affecting their work at all. This pattern suggests that community development efforts are more likely to be carried out in work environments that embrace social liberal values. This was the case in Davidson Perlmutter and Cnaan's (1999) study where a former community organizer took charge of a large recreation department in the United States and transformed some 200 site managers into active community organizers (p.57). He introduced a new philosophy to the department based on focussing on needs in the community, the importance of consulting excluded groups of people, and engaging the community as the primary stakeholder, dimensions I connect to social justice, social inclusion and community development respectively. His philosophy also incorporated an ethic of care because it required a climate of trust and respect.

4.2.4 Ethic of care. This value calls for a responsibility to care for others, based on relationships built on mutual trust and respect (Williams, 2001). Ten staff espoused the value of an ethic of care personally and six detected it in their workplaces, with only two of those people describing value congruency. The following story shared by Ron in the second focus group is an example of how his work was driven by an ethic of care.

Filipino family came here to Vancouver, father was a doctor... couldn't find a job, but the thing is that he thought Vancouver was the best fit and they established themselves in the low income housing complex. The father made the decision to go back to the Philippines and re-establish his trade, work and send money to the family. The dad passed away a couple of years ago.

The thing was that the parent (the mother) didn't have enough money, all of the financial source was gone. So, we got the whole family onto the leisure access card and the child took up swimming and skating and that and now she's going to [a nearby high school] right now, and she's not a bad swimmer. She's even thinking of maybe becoming a lifeguard!

So I mean, that's the story, and the leisure access card was the first thing that we thought, ok, no matter how terrible the thing that's happened to this

family at least we have the opportunity to take them away from their bad life, put them in a swimming pool, put them in a rink. That's what our facilities are for. This is an example of an ethic of care because of the way staff took on the responsibility of caring for this family based on an understanding of their situation (Tronto, 1993; Williams, 2001).

Another dimension of work based on an ethic of care is developing autonomy through interdependence (Williams, 2001), and this is something staff from the Downtown Eastside dedicated themselves to, as this quote illustrates:

If they need food, I'll give them food but I'll help them find a way of getting food next time. If they need help with housing, I'll go with them to the [Ministry of Housing] office but they'll go with me and they'll hopefully do most of the talking. (Josee, interview)

It is apparent from Josee's perspective that addressing some of the cross-cutting issues that come with being on low income is part of leisure access work in her neighbourhood. This is another example of where there is congruence between social liberal workplace values and personal values. However, compared to neoliberal values, social liberal values were seen as less dominant in workplaces as only the staff who worked in the lowest income neighbourhoods discussed these values being both personal and in their work environments.

4.2.5 Policy flexibility. Twelve staff were personally guided by the value of policy flexibility and six discussed it as a value their colleagues upheld. Of these people, four, staff discussed value congruency. These people included the leisure access coordinator and three staff who work in low income neighbourhoods. Policy flexibility was not officially promoted in Vancouver, but at the same time, the leisure access coordinator supported this value when it meant people who needed the service gain access:

There's a policy in place and as grey and black and white as it is, we try to spend as much time in the grey as we can so we can provide as much service as we can. (interview)

This quotation speaks to the social liberal mandates of the municipal recreation department and relates to the idea of “institutional redesign to facilitate dignified inclusion”, which is one of the key underlying themes of social liberalism discussed by Kershaw (2005, p.17). This is connected to social inclusion because it relates to the honouring of citizens' rights to public recreation (Shookner, 2002). It could also be connected to social justice because it denotes equity and fairness (Craig, 2002). I argue, however, that neither term really encompasses the value that drives staff in these particular circumstances, so I came up with a new social liberal value that which I called “policy flexibility”. Themes that fit under this value included: working around policy, encouraging people to apply for the LAC who do not fit the eligibility criteria but need financial help, and refusing to turn people away.

The closest connection to policy flexibility I found in the literature was in Scott's (2008) study where recreation staff discussed accommodating individual situations with flexible payment options, something they termed as going “above and beyond” their job descriptions. It is important to recognize that not everyone in my study would go “above and beyond” to help families in their communities, because not all staff are personally guided by policy flexibility or other social liberal values. Instead, some espoused a more masculinist neoliberal approach, so the influence of gender in leisure access work is considered next.

4.3 Gender Considerations

Ron was the only male staff person in this study who was personally guided by all four social liberal values and was the only male staff driven by community development and an ethic of care, both of which are linked to femininity in the literature (Dominelli, 2006; Fletcher, 1999). As a result, he had a more feminized approach to his work in comparison to his male colleagues who held neoliberal values. A greater proportion of male staff, five out of six, were personally driven by neoliberal values compared to ten out of 14 females. The following excerpt from David's interview is an example of a more masculine approach to leisure access work.

Kat: What's it like for you if you notice that their income, they're not going to qualify?

David: We tell them straight up. You know, you're going to get denied. But we don't discourage them to the point where, 'well I really want to do this', like if they want to do it, well then we'll do it for you because for low income earners, all we do is send it up to the LAC office and they get a response back in the mail. So if they don't qualify then we tell them upfront that 'You don't qualify, here are the guidelines' and if they still want to apply then we just do it for them. But we tell them that it's not worth the time, because you're just going to get denied.

David's approach is very different from his mostly female colleagues who tend to deliver such news in a more sensitive manner that is linked to an ethic of care (Williams, 2001). Instead, his comment demonstrates a more direct, unsympathetic approach that the literature links to masculinity (Brush, 1999). Although men are not economically, politically, or culturally expected to perform a fair share of care work because of traditional gender hierarchies and gender norms (Kershaw, 2005), an ethic of care is considered to be a central human concern that is not an exclusive response for women (Tronto 1993). Through what he calls a "carefair" framework, Kershaw (2005) urges

men to take on more socially responsible and equitable roles. Although he speaks mostly about caregiving in terms of the family, the term 'carefair' can be extended to leisure access work because it calls for "all citizens to make a minimum contribution to society's care needs" (Kershaw, 2005, p.129). The only two staff who were personally dedicated to all three neoliberal values of individualization, efficiency, and accountability were male and I found they were especially driven by individualization, so I continue considering gender influences as I move on to a discussion of how neoliberal values are reflected in leisure access work.

4.4 Neoliberal Values

4.4.1 Individualization. The neoliberal value of individualization provokes a 'blame the victim' mentality where individuals are held responsible for their own well-being and structural inequalities that disadvantage some groups are ignored (Anderson, 1996; Brodie, 2005). Following are examples from the two male staff who were personally guided by all three neoliberal values:

"If people value something they will find a way of paying for it." (Charlie, interview)

"...it would just be a hundred and something dollars a year which is very, in my eyes, very affordable." (David, interview)

Charlie and David do not acknowledge that some people do not have discretionary income for recreation user fees or that even when user fees are reduced, programs remain unaffordable to many people (Frisby et al., 2007). They also show no concern for barriers beyond user fees, such as transportation, childcare, proper clothing, social support, or body images issues (Frisby et al., 2007). This links my findings to the literature that associates masculinity with neoliberal values (McDowell, 2004; Pheonix, 2003). However, I also found that women are just as capable of exhibiting masculine

neoliberal values in their work which challenges gender (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Seven female and three male staff discussed sensing individualization in their workplaces in the approaches to leisure access work taken by many of their colleagues across the city. Four female staff, in addition to Charlie and David, were personally guided by this value. Only one person indicated value congruency in terms of individualized between her personal work values and the values operating in her community centre.

Another example of individualization involving female staff came from the first focus group when we discussed advertising for the LAC.

Kat: Why don't you do advertising?

Louise: It's a good question. I don't know why the Park Board chose to [advertise a certain recreation program] rather than LAC.

Monique: Well it's on our website and every single welfare office has a pad of forms that they can provide. Depending on how the social worker does their job because it's different how they share it but they have it.

Kat: But in terms of outreach?

Monique: All these people who are low income, I don't know if they can get it from our website or someone else can get it. Their worker from the [welfare office]. I think it's well-advertised, like it has been how many years now those forms on the website? I think at least 5-6 years.

Citizens living on low incomes are the least likely to have access to the internet (Taylor & Frisby, 2010), suggesting that having to ask for assistance with LAC paperwork ignores the stigmas attached to poverty and the likelihood that some people would not be comfortable doing this (Reid, 2004). Attitudes like these downplay environmental, social, and political factors that disadvantage some people over others and continue to place the onus on individuals to seek their own opportunities to participate (Arai & Reid, 2003; Jenson, 2001).

4.4.2 Efficiency. The neoliberal value of efficiency refers to accomplishing more while investing fewer resources (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004) and was discussed most often in this study in relation to the challenges of doing leisure access work. Cost reduction and revenue generation are important dimensions of efficiency that take precedence when municipal recreation departments are influenced by a neoliberal ideology (Thibault et al., 2004). As shown in Table 4.1, 17 staff discussed efficiency affecting their work through departmental policies and procedures. This is an indication of the dominance of neoliberal efficiency in the workplace. Of the 17, seven women and five men indicated they were also personally driven by this value, demonstrating congruency between personal and work environment values. It is important to acknowledge that of those who personally espoused this value, four men and four women described managing budgets as being part of their job responsibilities. For them, efficiency, cost reduction, and revenue generation were built into their work requirements, even though each of them were also personally driven by social liberal values. As the following quote illustrates, most, but not all, had difficulty negotiating tensions between these competing values.

We have a limited budget and we're expected to stay within the budget and quite often we don't. And every year there's a little bit, it seems I think, we're a bit more pressured to watch really how we do things. So it's interesting because you have the push to be customer friendly and to meet the demands of the public, because I believe that's the reason why we exist, but it has to be tempered with our budget which is limited." (Lucy, interview)

Lucy described having to go about her work in accordance to department targets that are quantifiably measurable, like increasing revenue and patronage by certain percentages. Staff like her who work in low income neighbourhoods found it especially

challenging to cope with quantifiable performance measures and pressures to generate revenue because these neoliberal dimensions were incongruent with the social liberal values.

4.4.3 Accountability. As shown in Table 4.1, accountability was something that nine female and one male staff detected in their department and that three females and three males adopted into their personal approaches to the work. Of those people, three women and three males indicated value congruency with respect to this value. Linked to an efficiency rationale, the neoliberal value of accountability is about controlling the use of public services (Ranson, 2003). In my study, the most common examples of accountability were efforts to limit the use of leisure access subsidies. Some did this by enforcing the strict eligibility requirements outlined by LAC policy and the following quote illustrates the extent to which some staff go to ensure that only people living on low incomes receive subsidies.

Just mother and two children are included on application but we don't know if they're separated or divorced because last year there was a husband. So trying to verify like, because just her income is low right, but where's your husband, where's your partner? You have to follow it up. Sometimes, 'oh we're separated', ok then provide us with a legal document. (Rose, interview)

Proof of poverty requirements like these are used as accountability measures to deter people from taking advantage of subsidies (Frisby et al., 2007), but discourage some low income people from applying as a consequence (Reid et al., 2002). This comment indicates a level of insensitivity that some staff invoke when they are guided by accountability values (Scott, 2000).

Another example of accountability was the purposeful limiting of advertising for the LAC and Community Association Board subsidies. Eight staff discussed this but

none admitted the reasoning behind it, except for Charlie who said: “We don’t advertise it. Once I advertise it, I would have so many people coming in for it” (interview). Staff who were guided by social liberal values questioned why this was a problem because more people participating in recreation should be viewed as a positive achievement: “For us, you know, it’s like what’s the worst thing that can happen? These individuals get a card and they recreate” (Louise, interview). These contradicting quotations highlight two different ideologies coexisting in leisure access work and illustrate some of the tensions involved for those holding social liberal values when the values of accountability and efficiency take precedence.

Section 2: Major Challenges in This Work and How Some Staff Negotiate Them

In this section, I discuss the challenges involved in leisure access work that were most commonly discussed by staff and highlight some of the different ways that they negotiated these challenges. The findings reveal that treating ideologies as binaries is not sufficient in explaining the complexities surrounding people’s descriptions of their work experiences (Lazzarato, 2009).

4.5 Financial Pressures

The literature describes the financial pressures on local governments where staff are in compromised positions between budget cuts and an increasing demand for services (Thibault et al., 2004). Dealing with these pressures represents one of the major challenges in leisure access work. Seventeen staff discussed financial pressures to ‘do more with less’, another example of the neoliberal value of efficiency (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004). Financial pressures were at an all time high for Vancouver municipal

recreation staff during the time of my study because of an economic recession and the hosting of the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. As Bert explained:

The city of Vancouver, which it's got some financial challenges of its own with the Olympics and the other issues that the city has, and the City is funding the Park Board to operate. And then of course the Park Board then has its own issues with the particular financial climate that we have now. All of those things add up to being a rather challenging circumstance for the individual programmers or individual operators out at their sites [who are being asked:] 'Can you offer more programs?' (Bert, focus group)

The total cost of hosting the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, including all infrastructural improvements for the region, is estimated to be between six and seven billion dollars (Impact On Communities Coalition, February 25, 2010). A recent cost estimate released by the City of Vancouver states that the municipality invested \$554.3 million of that grand total (City of Vancouver, 2010). Public recreation is most often one of the first targets of government budget cuts (Torjman, 2004), so knowing this, many staff were anticipating significant budget cuts to affect their work following the Games. Plans for budget cuts came sooner than expected, however, as shortly after the focus groups a newspaper article appeared in the Vancouver Courier (2009) stating that: "Budget cuts target 55 employees". In addition to cutting jobs, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation planned to address a \$2.8 million budget shortfall by reducing hours at community centres, pools and ice rinks and closing a children's farmyard and an environmental conservatory, two of the City's landmark recreation sites. All of these plans are tied to cost recovery and the neoliberal value of efficiency as the closures are expected to reduce costs for the City by \$100,000 a year. Bert's quote illustrated the tensions for staff when he said that among these cutbacks they are being asked 'Can you offer more programs?' He continued, "I think as recreation practitioners we feel as if

we're doing better work the more clients we're serving, but there are financial pressures to make sure that you do perform at the expected budget level" (focus group). He was speaking to the social liberal-neoliberal conflict that he and many of his colleagues experience between wanting to offer more services but being limited by financial constraints. Next, I discuss some ways that staff attempted to negotiate their work given this tension.

4.5.1 Limiting subsidies. A few recreation staff worked with additional Community Association Board policies that limited the amount and number of leisure access subsidies made available. For instance, in Ann's community centre, the Community Association Board decided that LACs would grant users a 50% discount on selected programs, like yoga and karate, and members of the community could receive an additional 25% off if they spoke with a programmer. Although it was advertised in their leisure guidebook and the intention reflects social inclusion values as it was designed with financial barriers in mind (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002), I argue this is an example of individualization because the onus is on community members to come forth and ask for help, something which many may feel uncomfortable doing (Anderson, 1996). An additional problem is that the subsidy is limited to two programs per season for each family, as described in the following interview:

Kat: [Is it] two programs per individual person per season? If they have three children, do they each get two programs per season?

Ann: It's per family.

Kat: oh, ok.

Ann: Yeah. And that's the difficult thing.... Because let's say your family is four. Two programs per [person]? I don't think so. That would be way out of whack...

so we really gotta be careful because some programs can be over \$100! So we can't be giving 75% away or we'd never break even!

As Ann alluded to, limiting the number of subsidies is difficult for staff who work with families with several children because it puts them in a position where they must explain that the subsidy will not accommodate them all. This example shows how some staff negotiated the financial pressures because subsidies were only made available up until a certain point where financial efficiency was threatened. This is especially challenging for staff who are personally guided by social liberal values but have budget responsibilities in their job descriptions.

Another example of limiting subsidies came from staff who implement the LAC policy somewhat differently by allowing LAC users to receive a 50% subsidy on certain programs only after they have reached a minimum number of registrants. As Heather explained: "We couldn't have a class fill up with LAC holders because it wouldn't break even, and then we're not fiscally responsible (interview)." She went on to analyse how this message could be interpreted by low income citizens:

If we're going to look at it... What it does is it says to the LAC person 'well, unfortunately you have to wait, you can't register yet, we have to wait and see if we can make enough money before you can register'. (Heather, interview)

Although she does not use the term, she connects this approach to individualization by pointing out the unfair 'blame the victim' message that comes through when such conditions are applied to subsidies. Staff who are personally guided by social liberal values were uncomfortable limiting the availability of subsidies, but financial pressures left them with few other options. This is an example where staff had difficulty reconciling their professional and personal values (Reid, 1995). Next, I discuss how staff negotiated the neoliberal value of revenue generation as a way of relieving financial pressures.

This finding illustrates that neoliberalism and social liberalism do not exist as simple binaries because revenue generation is sometimes used to promote rather than to obstruct leisure access work.

4.5.2 Raising revenue to supplement leisure access. Almost half of the staff in my study conceptualized leisure access as a ‘cost’ to their organization, as is outlined in this quotation:

There’s two principle kind of costs: there’s the internal staffing, processing and handling costs, which is often invisible and hard to calculate. You have to bring staff in and you have to pay them and they’re exclusively dedicated to the task of processing the application forms, that’s pretty reasonable accounting if they’re doing that everyday. If you’re asking programmers, coordinators, [recreation facility clerks], program assistants and a host of other folks to support and assist and spend some of their day advocating and meeting with people, it’s impossible to count, so it’s the staffing cost, fixed and hidden. And there’s also the lost opportunity for revenue. (Bunny, interview)

This explanation reflects a business-oriented approach as it all comes back to the return-on-investment mentality (Frisby & Millar, 2002). The argument regarding ‘lost opportunity for revenue’ is based on a neoliberal-driven assumption that people accessing leisure access subsidies would pay full-price otherwise. Not surprisingly, of the eight people who discussed leisure access as a cost, seven were personally guided by the neoliberal value of efficiency.

A few staff in my study negotiated financial pressures by making efforts to supplement the perceived cost of leisure access. Two staff discussed generating a consistent revenue stream through their fitness centres to allow them to continue offering leisure access services, one of which called the fitness centre her “saving grace” for that very reason. This demonstrates how neoliberal values can sometimes contribute to social liberal programming. The closest example of this I could find in the

literature was when Frisby, Alexander and Taylor (2009) described how the city of Winnipeg reinvests revenue from municipal recreation programs into a wide range of free recreation opportunities in low income neighbourhoods.

Another example of raising revenue to supplement leisure access was staff who apply for grants from private and government agencies, as Ron explains here:

Grant writing is what I need to do to sustain what I offer to my community because my community does not have the disposable income to pay for services that we offer, to pay for the cost of instruction, to pay for the infrastructure or the equipment that we use to provide our services. (interview)

Program costs are often justified by a minimum number of participants for programs to be considered worth funding (Thibault et al., 2004). Staff must keep track of program numbers to include these statistics in their grant applications, linking their work to the neoliberal value of accountability and showing again how neoliberalism is sometimes linked to social liberal work. The next challenge discussed is understaffing, which is related to financial pressures. The ways some staff negotiate this challenge further illustrates the co-existence of neoliberal and social liberal values.

4.6 Not Enough Staff in LAC Office

There is usually only one person processing applications each day at the LAC office and with 18,000 applicants a year, there is a four to eight week waiting period for a LAC. This was a major concern for a number of staff who believed in the positive benefits of recreation because it meant that patrons had to wait considerable amounts of time before they can start participating. But, as Lance describes:

The economic reality right now is that getting another staff member to deal with that is probably slim to none. So we're not going to get additional financing to support what we need or what communities need, yet for the individuals who are in that position there's going to be more pressure. (focus group)

This quotation re-emphasizes the pressure to do more with less and how this affects leisure access workers. Lance implied that the LAC office will soon become overwhelmed, at which point Karla and Ron corrected him, saying the LAC office is *already* overwhelmed. This is another example of a tension between social liberal and neoliberal values because staff would like more staffing in the LAC office to decrease the wait period for low income families, but limited resources are used as a justification to continue operating in traditional ways (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

4.6.1 Checking applications for completion. A way that five staff negotiated this challenge was to try and expedite the LAC process for patrons by looking over their applications before they were sent off to the LAC office to make sure all of the necessary documents were included and completed properly. This was something I first tied to the neoliberal value of efficiency, but as this quote demonstrates, it more closely connects with an ethic of care.

If they even send it through and it's not good, it's like an additional couple weeks. So we try to circumvent that a bit and make sure they've got all the right paperwork, if not, what else do you need and send them on their way, bring it back. So it's a complete package. (Ann, interview)

It is important to note that not all staff do this, as some like Sharmaine believe the information is too personal. In the next section, I consider additional ways that working with the LAC policy can be challenging.

4.7 Limitations of Current Policy

No one in this study questioned the need for LAC policy because all staff believed policy is necessary to have something in place to be able to justify offering services to people living on low incomes. The problem was that the current policy

design was challenging to work with because of its' strict criteria and 'prove poverty' requirements that compromised staff's abilities to meet community needs. My findings suggest that having to deny the LAC to a family that may need that financial assistance is a major challenge for some staff: "Like, 'you didn't make it. You didn't make the cut. You're making \$2,000, \$5,000 over the limit'. That's really hard. It's really hard to say no" (Louise, interview). This quotation demonstrates the ethic of care that commonly drives this work as staff who are personally guided by this value often spoke regretfully about not being able to provide access. In these cases, staff feel hamstrung by the accountability measures of policy, adding support for Frisby, Reid and Ponic's (2007) contention that neoliberalism imposes a stranglehold on the ability of recreation departments to deliver services.

In addition, several staff felt the current requirements excluded some groups of people. The excerpt below from the second focus group illustrates how this created challenges for both staff and the applicants they work with.

Heather: It requires a certain level of capacity to actually go through the application process. There's a whole segment of the population that doesn't have the literacy skills, the ability to go through that.

Shannon: The language skills too.

Heather: Language skills, so literacy and language, ESL being an issue. So they may be able to read and write in another language but to actually understand what the guidelines are is difficult and then, on top of that, people who English is their first language but don't have that [comprehension]. The other part that can be challenging is it requires a Vancouver address and there's a whole segment of the population that doesn't have a current address. So how do we go about providing that service to that particular group who can't come in and say, "this is my hydro bill, my telephone bill"? They don't have it. They may live at a rooming house where they don't have those services. They pay cash, or they live on the street.

This example highlights some of the complexities that accompany leisure access work. As both of these staff were personally guided by social inclusion, they recognized barriers to recreation and tried to come up with ways to include more people (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). Allison and Hibbler (2004) found that language differences between recreation staff and community members were a significant barrier to outreach efforts. As one recreation staff person in their study noted, “if programs are only marketed and developed with an English-speaking community in mind, then there will continue to be many under-served communities whose primary language of choice is not English” (Allison & Hibbler, 2004, p. 274). This is a prevalent issue for staff in my study because the LAC paperwork is only made available in English so the current policy does not accommodate Vancouver’s diverse communities and high levels of immigration. For instance, Ann told me there are approximately 50 different languages spoken in her community. Next, I consider how some staff negotiate this challenge.

4.7.1 Providing translation. Several staff across the city negotiated language differences by helping as best they can, like Rebecca who said, “sometimes they don’t speak the language so we do the courtesy of translating for them.” If staff cannot provide translation themselves, they often try to find another staff person who can, sometimes even soliciting help from other patrons. Two staff told me that if no one is available for translation they do their best to communicate with the individual through informal sign language. These efforts are evidence of social inclusion as well as an ethic of care because staff are honouring diversity and taking on a responsibility to help people (Williams, 2001), by working outside the boundaries of their defined job descriptions and the restrictions of the policy.

In other centres, providing such assistance depends on how busy the staff were and whether or not they had the language capabilities to help. Bunny suggested it also depended on staff's willingness to assist as he feels this varies. For example, at an East Vancouver location, David told me they have a supplementary policy that they do not assist with filling out LAC applications or with language translation. The reason given for this was;

Not because we don't want to be nice, we just don't want to be overwhelmed. If we do it for one person, the whole city is going to come looking for us to help fill these forms out for them. (David, interview)

This quote touches on the differences in how the work is negotiated. Ironically, earlier the same day I had spoken with two other staff working at the same community centre who both told me they helped people fill out LAC paperwork. One said she had even called the leisure access office on behalf of patrons to ask specific questions regarding their applications. Her work is more influenced by an ethic of care, whereas David placed greater value on accountability. This undoubtedly created tensions for staff when they felt compelled to subvert policy when it did not coincide with their own personal values. This also highlights how the co-existence of social liberal and neoliberal values in the workplace created inconsistencies and unequal treatment of citizens.

4.7.2 Outreach. Outreach efforts were another way that staff negotiated the exclusionary nature of the LAC policy. These efforts did not have to be on a large scale as Linda demonstrated in her interview. She noticed that one mother suddenly pulled her children out of pay-per-use programs, so she approached the woman to ask if she needed help. As it turned out, the family was undergoing a sudden financial crisis and could no longer afford the user fees for the children's recreation programs. Since the

LAC is based on the previous year's tax assessment, they did not qualify, so Linda applied to the Community Association Board subsidy so the children could continue to participate. Linda explained, "I think [the mother] was kind of hoping for a bit of help but she didn't know how to ask" (interview). By reaching out to this family, Linda took on extra responsibility to assist them, which reflects an ethic of care (Williams, 2001). A reason the mother did not know how to ask may be related to the fact that subsidy opportunities are rarely advertised (Frisby, et al., 2005), but there is also a negative stigma attached to receiving financial assistance (Reid, 2004). A few staff recognized this stigma and tried to lessen its effects by facilitating private conversations with patrons where, in a respectful manner, they asked what the person was able to afford. While this tactic is less invasive and reflects an ethic of care, at least two challenges related to neoliberalism remain. The first is that it requires being able to identify who 'needs help', so the onus remains on individuals to come forward and self-identify as needing financial assistance which is a further illustration of individualization (Anderson, 1996). The second speaks to limited capacity which is connected to efficiency values, as Bunny pointed out: "Imagine the cost to the municipal tax payers of having a long line of people conducting interviews, one-on-one." In a neoliberal era, justifying the cost of a more social liberal approach to leisure access work is likely to be difficult.

4.7.3 Working around policy. The previous example from Linda also demonstrated how staff worked around the LAC policy to facilitate inclusion, which is another way that half of the staff in this study negotiated the limitations of current policy. The leisure access coordinator reported getting questions from staff across the city every day about how they can accommodate personal situations given the restrictions

with the policy and whether or not they can make exceptions. Staff acknowledged situations where people's financial situations had suddenly changed due to job loss or business failure. Monique discussed an example where a woman needed regular physical activity as therapy for an injury, but her medical expenses were so high that she could not afford the full cost of participation at her local community centre. Her income was only a few thousand dollars over the low income cut-off line so she was not technically eligible for a LAC, but Monique pleaded her case.

I started, you know, emailing everyone, can we please give her a leisure pass because she's going to paying clinic everyday. My heart was just absolutely with her, so I did all my best, few phone calls and few emails later, finally they approved and I gave her a leisure pass. (interview)

Final decisions to override policy stipulations are approved by people with organizational power, such as recreation supervisors and the LAC program supervisor, but this also shows that staff with lower positional power can exercise what Rao, Stuart and Kelleher (1999) call 'agenda setting power' by bringing issues forward for consideration. In this light, leisure access work sometimes involved collaborative efforts promoted by community development values (Frisby & Millar, 2002). This approach offsets the value of individualization where the responsibility is put on citizens to seek access on their own (Anderson, 1996). With the value of policy flexibility came another challenge in leisure access work: dealing with inconsistencies in policy implementation.

4.8 Inconsistencies in Policy Implementation

The lack of consistency in the way the LAC policy was implemented across the city was a challenge for frontline staff, particularly those who worked in centres with a high number of LAC applicants. It was frustrating for many because in most cases they

tried to follow the policy as outlined, which requires citizens to present certain documents to get the LAC, but they encounter citizens who get upset because they were not required to go through this same procedure at other community centres in the city. A discussion from the second focus group illustrates this challenge:

Sharmaine: It would be nice to get consistency, you know, something documented to all the centers. This is what we follow. It's like, you know, they come and it's like 'oh I can get it from somewhere else', you know, they won't even ask me a question. That's really kind of hard.

Karla: It kind of devalues the actual process.

Others: (agree with head nods and 'uh-huhs')

Karla: We always want to try and follow [the policy] and then they don't trust us as Parks Board employees telling them the truth.

Others: (agree with head nods and 'uh-huhs')

Karla: And then we don't feel like we believe it because if we know they might be able to get it [at another place]. You feel that, right?

Bunny: I've witnessed that, I've witnessed that. Negative feedback. "Last time I was here they didn't, and when I went there they didn't..."

It was argued here that encountering reoccurring situations like these decreased staff's sense of support for their work. The literature suggests that if upper management do not think certain issues are problematic then it is unlikely that they will be addressed (Hoeber, 2007). The leisure access coordinator actually favoured flexibility in policy implementation but this created uncertainty for staff and inconsistency for applicants. This demonstrated that operating from social liberal values is not always 'good' as suggested in the literature that also tends to pit neo-liberalism as 'bad' (Brodie, 2007). My study is revealing some of the nuances that, as discussed earlier, illustrate that

social liberal and neoliberal values can be intertwined at times and can have a range of impacts on staff and citizens. The negotiation of inconsistency is discussed next and provides another example of the co-existence of these typically opposing values.

4.8.1 Wanting stricter procedures. Five front desk staff and one lifeguard negotiated inconsistency by lobbying for stricter procedures and standardization, as illustrated in Shannon's comment:

That's where the challenges are, that everything is grey, grey area about the LAC. And often, what bothers me is that often it is left to our judgment and I don't want this to be left to our judgement. Like I don't want to judge, you know, the person because of, you know, the shape of her nose and the look in her eyes, you know, I like her, so I give her LAC. I don't want it to be that way. I want this to be clear-cut. (interview)

This quotation can be linked to social justice because it shows how staff wanted to treat people fairly, while accepting differences and diversity in their communities (Craig, 2002). But, several also wanted more rules and guidelines put in place to improve consistency in the way leisure access work is done across the city, which is a neoliberal bureaucratic-type solution. The six staff who wanted more consistency also called for additional accountability measures to facilitate greater control over leisure access. The ability to control is linked to masculine ideals in organizations (Acker, 2000), and counters arguments that access should be designed in more equitable ways by acknowledging diverse life circumstances (Labonte, 2004). This negotiation of leisure access work comes up again under the next challenge regarding perceived abuse of the LAC policy.

4.9 Perceived Abuse of the LAC Policy

Another challenge that staff struggled with in their work is negotiating what they call 'abuse' of the LAC policy. This term was used to describe situations where staff believed a LAC is being used by someone who does not live on low income and is therefore taking advantage of the system. Comments about policy abuse from staff was detected more frequently in neighbourhoods that had undergone gentrification and occupied people in diverse financial situations. Several staff complained that high levels of LAC policy abuse strain finances and compromise cost-recovery, so at first I thought the frustration was linked to a neoliberal value of efficiency (Thibault et al., 2004). But, the following two quotations from Shannon highlighted why policy abuse was especially frustrating for staff who operate from social liberal values.

It's not that the cashiers or me or anyone working the frontline are against the system, against the LAC program. This program is great and there are many people who wouldn't be able to afford it without some financial help. But, on the other hand, when you see people who you know should not have one and we have no idea how they got one but they got one.

When I asked her why this bothered her, she replied:

They are actually taking money away from people who really need it. Because, guess what, if people who are abusing it and they can actually pay, we could have way more money and let's say offer free programs for kids who really need it and really deserve it. (interview)

This quotation reflects a collision between social liberal and neoliberal values because her frustration was fuelled by a concern for how abuse affects low income citizens, relating to achieving fairness and meeting needs (Brodie, 2007; Craig, 2002). Although over half of the staff were personally driven by social justice values, several front desk staff took a neoliberal stance to this challenge, similar to the inconsistency challenge, by

calling for stricter procedures to reduce the amount of abuse. Two other ways staff negotiated this challenge, by stereotyping or not judging people, provide further illustration of the tensions between social liberal and neoliberal ideologies in this work.

4.9.1 Stereotyping. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, I heard time and time again stories of people driving up to the community centre in their fancy cars, setting their designer purses down on the front counter, and then swiping their LAC to go for a free swim. In total, 13 staff discussed this, but it was interesting that when probed most talked about hearing such comments from their colleagues rather than actually experiencing such situations first hand. The following quotation demonstrates how these stereotypes were problematic: “They come with their Mercedes and Gucci bags. I know they can afford the family rate, they don’t need the leisure pass but nevertheless they still come with it” (Monique, interview). This quotation suggested that if people do not ‘look poor’, then they are trying to abuse the system. This adds another layer to a neoliberal ‘blame the victim’ ideology by projecting an image of what leisure access recipients should *not* look like, contributing to an unfair stereotyping of low income citizens as discussed by Frisby et al. (2005) and Reid (2004).

4.9.2 Not our place to judge. In contrast, several other staff were quick to point out that appearances do not necessarily reflect one’s actual financial situation. Bert provided two examples of this. First, he discussed someone he encountered in a neighbouring city who was living in a luxury car because it was all they had left. Next, he described how cultural differences could figure in.

Certain cultures believe that their wealth has to be transportable. So you can have somebody that has gold dangling from every limb, they have absolutely nothing in the bank and they don’t have a home, because all of their wealth is on their body. And then if you ask them if they can pay the admission and they say

no, it seems incongruent that they can't pay and yet they've got thousands of dollars dangling from their body. They've got diamond earrings and they've got gold from their ankles and their wrists, and yet they have no funds. (focus group)

Over half of the staff in this study acknowledged that they are not in a position to judge people who come into their centre and ask for leisure access services. I linked this perspective to social justice because it relates to recognizing dignity and treating people fairly (Craig, 2002). It is important to note that this approach was unique to those who were personally driven by social justice values because a few front desk staff talked about treating people fairly because of instructions from management. The following quotation is an example: "We can't judge, that's what we are told" (Sharmaine, interview). This is an example of how social liberalism affected the work environment when upper management promoted it. Some front desk staff found it challenging when the dominating ideology in their community centres conflicted with their personal values. This is because front desk staff lack positional power to modify organizational practices, meaning they were in positions where they are expected to follow orders from management, whether or not they agree with them as is suggested in Sharmaine's quote (Rao, et al., 1999). Dominelli (2006) found that some social workers report feeling resentful when they are compelled to implement policies they do not agree with and they do not feel they have the ability to influence change within their organization (Dominelli, 2006). This relates to "not being heard", a recurrent theme in the data that I discuss next as a final challenge in leisure access work in this study.

4.10 Not Being Heard

Several front desk staff expressed frustration in interviews and focus groups because management had not yet developed stricter policy procedures. As a result, six people felt their concerns were not being heard in their organization, as depicted in the following excerpt from Karla's interview:

Karla: When you have people driving up in BMWs and then they have a leisure access card, makes you even more cynical. You're driving a pretty decent car to be on leisure access. Hmm, question you.

Kat: But you accept it?

Karla: We accept it because we have to. We know there's no real regulation, like (exhales), there's nothing stopping it.

Kat: So do you think that maybe the Park Board is not aware of how much the system is being abused? Or why have there not been any changes?

Karla: Or maybe not believing it. Not speaking to the front line. I think there's a huge communication breakdown or gap between upper management and front line.

In addition to reflecting a top-down hierarchical structure that is characteristic of masculinized neoliberal organizations (Pheonix, 2003), the bitterness behind this quotation suggests an us/them positioning between frontline staff and management that is related to power imbalances in the organization. Rao et al. (1999) refer to this as the power of dialogue where only certain voices in an organization are consulted and heard and others are excluded and silenced. The ways this is negotiated is discussed next.

4.10.1 Decreased appreciation for leisure access work. As Karla mentioned in the excerpt above, some staff who perceive the LAC is being abused adopt a cynical attitude towards leisure access work. She brought this up again in the second focus group during a discussion of perceived abuse of the LAC policy.

Karla: That's when the morale of your staff goes down. Cynical. Cynical.

Lance: I've never been able to figure out how our cashiers or people in our front offices can figure out people are driving Benz' or... (shakes his head)

Karla: They know.

Linda: You can tell. (laughs)

Sharmaine: (laughs and nods head in agreement)

Karla: You know why? You can tell because they actually put it in front of you.

Lance: What do they do, follow them out to their car? (laughs)

Karla: They put the car keys in front of you.

Ron: And it's sad to say there is a small percentage of people that abuse it and it puts a bad taste on everyone else.

Lance: Small percentage?

Ron: Well... You think it's a large percentage?

Bunny: I think actually Ron... the perception.

Lance: Perception (nods head in agreement)

Bunny: The perception out there is the majority of leisure access card holders are not eligible and that people who truly need it don't get it because they don't know about it.

This discussion is an excellent example of the different perspectives affecting leisure access work because the front desk staff in this group considered abuse to be a major challenge, the supervisors felt it was more of a perception than a reality, and the programmer was mystified to hear his colleagues talking about abuse because it is not conceptualized this way in the Downtown Eastside community centre where he worked. In actuality, staff who worked in the Downtown Eastside were much less concerned

about eligibility criteria and proof of poverty requirements because they were more certain that members of their community were living below the poverty line.

It affected morale when front desk staff repeatedly witnessed perceived abuse of the LAC policy as they felt their concerns were being disregarded at the management level. In turn, this is interpreted as low support from management for the leisure access work that front desk staff do and, as a result, some take on a cynical outlook. This relates to Dominelli's (2006) findings that social workers adopt a resentful approach to their work when they feel as if they cannot provoke change in their organization.

The next quotation further illustrates how a decreased appreciation for leisure access work is sometimes perpetuated or resisted.

For every disrespectful person there are probably nine and a half respectful people. You don't remember those polite conversations with the other nine and a half, you remember the one jerk... and that sticks with you. And that over time, over a long period of time, really minimizes your appreciation for what we are doing to make people's lives more fulfilled by reducing fees to create access.
(Bunny, interview)

The danger of negotiations like this is that if a minimized appreciation for leisure access work is translated into cynical or resentful approaches to frontline of service delivery, low income citizens will have an even more difficult time accessing municipal recreation. Negative attitudes from staff and management have been found to create additional barriers to participation for marginalized citizens (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). Focus groups discussions helped build awareness of this problem and got staff thinking about ways it could be addressed:

Lance: I think the issue is the value and we've heard that word used quite frequently in the last half hour. We don't talk about the value of this program and its importance enough from an organizational perspective.

Ron: Yep. And I do think in terms of value, I think we need to have all our staff, especially the frontline staff, you know value this program. So it's not as onerous and there's not as much cynicism.

One of the ways this focus group thought staff could be reminded of the importance of their work is by sharing stories from families for whom leisure access truly makes a difference. Staff rarely discuss their work with colleagues from other centres and it was apparent in the focus groups that they would like more opportunities to do so because this facilitates the sharing of experiences as well as effective tactics for negotiating and overcoming challenges. This was one of the recommendations that staff made to improve their ability to go about leisure access work.

4.10.2 Voicing their ideas. Some front desk staff negotiate the challenge of not being heard by resisting the power of dialogue in their organization and voicing their ideas and opinions. This may be rare in recreation departments as Davidson Perlmutter and Cnaan (1999) found that frontline staff were discouraged from making recommendations or initiating new ideas because of tight budgets that allowed no room for creativity. Additionally, Allison and Hibbler (2004) discussed budget constraints as a rationale used by management for resisting change and continuing to operate in the same ways. Despite these findings, there were a few examples when front desk staff in my study made their voices heard. Shannon provided another when she discussed front desk staff working together to voice their concerns regarding challenges with current policy: "After many, many phone calls and email discussions with [the leisure access coordinator]... We go back to [the leisure access coordinator] and say give us the guidelines" (interview). Rao et al. (1999) consider this to be an exercise of agenda-setting power, which is more commonly employed by people with positional power.

Acker (2000) argues that in order for new ideas to be legitimated a person with positional power must champion them. This may be a possibility in Vancouver given the collaborative relationship between the leisure access coordinator and some frontline staff, as Shannon explained:

That was really refreshing because after years of trying to email people and getting a total wall, suddenly I email and hey. And I never really resigned from doing it, like I kept emailing. The Park Board pays me to do my job, this is part of my job so whatever you do, I do my job. You don't respond to me, I still email. This is my job. And when [the new leisure access coordinator] started working, suddenly I started getting responses and prompt. (interview)

Many staff also perceived the interviews and focus groups as a venue to have their voices heard, as they said things to me like: "from an outsider reviewer like yourself for example, I think it would help them see the issues that we're having and make it better" (David, interview). This quote emphasizes a hope for change among lower level staff but it also reflects the dangers of exclusionary power when staff are reluctant to voice their opinions directly because they feel as lower level staff they have little influence in their organization (Hoerber, 2007). As an example, after discussing ideas for improving their work, I asked each interviewee what it would take for change to happen and if they were in a position to provoke that change. The following quote from Alexia was a common response from frontline staff.

I don't think it depends on the people out on front, I mean we're not going to be the, umm, guideline form people, you know... it's more the financial, it's more what we can put into it. And, you know, we're not at the level that we can make the decisions no matter what input we give them, right. We can suggest, but at the end of the day, the money is the key factor I think. (Alexia, interview)

In addition to illustrating implications of exclusionary power in bureaucracies, this quote provides more evidence that neoliberal values dominated at higher management levels.

4.11 Improving Leisure Access Work

Building upon the significance of ‘voicing their ideas’, this concluding section discusses the recommendations for improving leisure access work that were most commonly identified by staff.

4.11.1 Improve lines of communication between management and frontline staff and between community centres. Frontline staff are rarely consulted about the work they do (Allison & Hibbler, 2004), but have unique insights into the needs in their communities that could help management design and support appropriate policies and programs. If management visited recreation facilities more frequently and engaged with people who work on the frontline, staff felt their work would be better understood. A key finding was that staff rarely discussed leisure access work with colleagues from other community centres. It was apparent in focus groups they would like more opportunities to do so because this facilitates the sharing of experiences as well as effective tactics for negotiating and overcoming challenges. With limited resources, it is unlikely to have regular in-person meetings. One idea presented in a focus group was to develop a ‘LAC blog’ where staff could log on and communicate with colleagues city-wide.

4.11.2 Decrease wait time for patrons. It was interesting that staff often talked about patrons rather than themselves when discussing improvements to their work. For example, several staff felt that the current wait time for a LAC was unresponsiveness to citizen needs. Adding more staff to the LAC office is an obvious solution, but recent budget cuts made that unlikely. One idea was to create an in-person application process in community centres where staff would be available to translate and answer questions and make sure all applications are complete, similar to a ‘passport office’.

Another idea is to develop an alert system so that staff could see when a patron is approaching an expiry date so they could remind them in-person to submit their application early enough to avoid a wait time. Several staff would also like to see an expedited renewal process that requires less documentation.

4.11.3 Address issue of LAC abuse. The issue of LAC abuse needs to be addressed because many staff are frustrated that negative reactions are compromising the City values of inclusiveness and integrity (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, n.d.c). Several staff would like to see a dollar value attributed to the LAC, not necessarily a cost to users, but something to increase respect for the card and signify to users that it is not simply 'the free swim pass', but is intended to provide help to those who need it.

4.11.4 Revisit the organizational philosophy around this work. One of the reasons there are many inconsistencies across the City around this work is because staff rarely discuss the values underpinning the work. Just as program objectives need to be better articulated to the public, management, city councilors and other staff need to be educated about the challenges of leisure access work. It is possible that accepting a certain level of LAC abuse is necessary in order to offer a leisure access program that limits the stigmatization of living on low incomes. In any case, the organizational philosophy regarding leisure access work needs to foster two-way communication to improve work conditions and responsiveness to the public, according to many staff.

Conclusions and recommendations for future research are considered next in the final chapter of my thesis.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

By engaging directly with staff who do leisure access work, this research builds on work by Allison and Hibbler (2004) and Scott (2008), by creating a more thorough analysis of this type of work and an awareness of various complexities and challenges involved. This final chapter begins with a summary of conclusions pertaining to each research question, followed by a discussion of the contributions to the literature, recommendations for future research, and ends with concluding remarks.

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 Social liberal and neoliberal values. In terms of how social liberal and neoliberal values are reflected in leisure access work, I found that both sets of values are embedded in this work, that they are intertwined at times, and that they vary across staff and the City of Vancouver. Seventeen staff were personally driven by the value of social justice, 14 were driven by social inclusion, 4 by community development, 10 by an ethic of care, and 12 by policy flexibility, which was an additional social liberal value uncovered. Seven staff saw the value of social justice operating in their workplace, seven others saw social inclusion, five detected community development, six detected an ethic of care and another six detected policy flexibility. These findings show that social liberal values were promoted in some workplaces. Of these people, five felt there were value congruencies between their personal approach to this work and what was being promoted in their workplace. These staff worked with low income communities where workplace philosophies are predominately guided by social liberal values and less affected by neoliberal values.

Six staff were personally driven by individualization, 11 were driven by efficiency, and six by accountability. Ten staff saw individualization as operating in their workplace, 17 saw efficiency, and 10 saw accountability. These findings contribute to the literature that describes neoliberal values as dominating municipal recreation as more staff detected neoliberal values in their workplace in comparison to social liberal values. Of the 17 people who saw efficiency as operating in their workplace, 11 saw value congruency with their personal approach but most of these people had budget responsibilities so financial efficiency was built into their work requirements. Only one person detected value congruency regarding individualization and only three people detected value congruency regarding accountability. While some espoused personal neoliberal values which aligned with the dominant ideology in their workplaces, value incongruence led to tensions for other staff as those who espoused social liberal values in work environments dominated by neoliberalism sometimes did not feel supported in their work. Rather than existing as a static binary, the findings illustrate the complexities of how neoliberal and social liberal values affect and create challenges for leisure access workers.

5.1.2 Challenges and negotiating them. The analysis of the second and third research questions were combined which asked how the most prominent challenges in this work were related to social liberal and neoliberal ideologies and how they were negotiated. The challenges identified by staff were financial pressures, not having enough staff in the LAC office, limitations of current LAC policy, inconsistencies in policy implementation, perceived abuse of the LAC policy, and not being heard. I found that most challenges were related to a dominance of neoliberal ideology at a departmental

level and that limited resources were commonly used as a justification for continuing to operate in a traditional way (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

Some staff negotiated the challenge of financial pressures by adopting neoliberal values and making efforts to limit subsidies and raise revenues to supplement the 'cost' of leisure access. In face of the understaffing challenge, a few staff took an efficiency approach by checking applications for completion to expedite the process for citizens so they could begin participation sooner. This was an example where something that may be interpreted by some as being efficiency under a neoliberal ideology can also be seen as exhibiting social liberalism through an ethic of care. Negotiations of the challenges with current policy were more reflective of social liberal values as staff discussed providing translation, outreach efforts, and working around the policy. I connected the two former negotiations to an ethic of care and the latter to policy flexibility. Negotiations of the perceived abuse of the LAC policy reflected the co-existence of social liberal and neoliberal ideologies in this work as 13 staff reported stereotyping of LAC users, an approach I linked to individualization, and 12 discussed a non-judgemental approach related to social justice. The final challenge was not being heard in their organization, which highlights a power of dialogue that some sensed in their workplace. A few front desk staff negotiated this challenge with a decreased appreciation for leisure access work, which others argued was connected to a low sense of support for the work that they do and in some cases led to resentful or cynical approaches. Others challenged the power of dialogue and looked for opportunities to voice their ideas and recommendations to management and others they perceived had agenda-setting power, including myself through this study.

5.2. Contributions to the Literature

Theorists claim the market-based neoliberal ideology has usurped social liberal values of equality and collective responsibility in western governments (Lazzarato, 2009; Brodie, 2007). Consequently, recreation researchers often refer to neoliberalism as a dominating and negative politic that is to be blamed for a decline in values associated with social liberalism. My findings challenge simplistic binary conceptions that typically depict leisure access work as being social liberal and 'good' and local government work environments as being neo-liberal and 'bad'. In contrast, I found instances where neoliberal values augmented the work, like when efforts were made to raise revenue in other areas to fund leisure access initiatives. There were also several occasions when I had trouble deciding how to categorize the data because some statements made by staff seemed to reflect both social liberal and neoliberal values, like when staff discussed frustration with perceived LAC policy abuse. These findings also challenge binary conceptions and build on work by Lazzarato (2009) who argued that, "the all-inclusive category of ideology insufficiently expresses the complex relationship between discursive practices and relations of power" (p.113). This suggests that sometimes data cannot fit cleanly into one ideology or another because of the complexity surrounding people's descriptions of their experiences, actions taken by individuals and organizations, written and unwritten policies, and inherent expressions of power. It also adds support to Graham and Phillips' (2007) work that describes values underpinning public sector work as being more fluid in nature.

Previous research has illustrated some of the challenges in leisure access work (Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Frisby & Millar, 2002; Scott, 2008), but this study took the

analysis a step further by focussing on how staff negotiated some of those challenges. This study contributes discussions of exclusionary power and gender to the recreation literature as I found staff doing the work were compromised by both. For example, there was evidence of a clash between a feminized approach to this work that required sensitivity and empathy and negotiations of dominant masculine discourses that characterized a business-oriented neoliberal approach (Fletcher, 1999; Knights & Kerfoot, 2004). A greater proportion of men than women were personally driven by neoliberal values in this study, but I found several examples where women exhibited masculine neoliberal values in their work which supported previous findings (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003).

5.3. Recommendations for Future Research

This study raised a number of questions that require further investigation that are outlined below.

5.3.1 Conceptualization of recreation as a right and how that affects leisure access subsidies. A controversy that emerged in this study was a belief that public recreation is a right of citizenship but that leisure access subsidies are a privilege. The two ideas contradict one another because one suggests recreation is for 'everyone' and the other claims it is a special honour for those living on low incomes, demonstrating two tiers of service provision (Frisby & Millar, 2002). Some researchers suggests that public recreation has decreased in its recognition as a right of citizenship since the neoliberal surge in government (Harvey, 2001), but my study challenges this because several staff still argue it is a right and they use this claim as a rationale for justifying the

importance of their work. More research is needed to determine what the implications are of these different perspectives on leisure access in public recreation.

5.3.2 Effective outreach strategies for leisure access work. As discussed in my study, there are many groups of people who are excluded from traditional leisure access policies including: the working poor whose income is above the low-income threshold but lack discretionary funds for recreation, those who do not have a fixed address, and those who do not speak the traditional colonial language of English. Immigrants have received little attention in the recreation literature and such an omission is of critical importance in cities like Vancouver with high levels of immigration. A recent study has shown that recent immigrant Chinese women are interested in participating in local recreation, but that various barriers including language stand in their way (Huang, Frisby & Thibault, 2009). Future research is needed to learn how municipal recreation departments can effectively reach traditionally excluded groups and design programs in ways that address their needs and interests. I recommend a social inclusion approach, which requires ongoing dialogue with the community throughout brainstorming, implementation, and evaluation stages and extends beyond simply 'opening the doors' (Ponic, 2007).

5.3.3 Perspectives of upper management, politicians, and intended users. While this study shed light on perspectives of staff who are involved in leisure access work, it remains unknown how citizens, upper management, and politicians view this work. I found that exclusionary power was a significant influence on the work of frontline staff and bureaucratic power relations were a factor in explaining why no changes were being made. Future research should include people with agenda-setting power to

further explore the nuances in this work and to determine what is required to further support it. Additionally, I argue that intended users of leisure access must remain the cornerstone of both practical and research endeavors because as Frisby and Millar (2002) pointed out, they know best how their interests and needs can be met.

5.4. Concluding Remarks

By examining the complex relationships of values and ideologies that underpin leisure access work, this study has facilitated a deeper understanding of the nuances it entails. This research is important for the many staff who are involved in this work across the City of Vancouver, to the 18,000 who are using the LAC policy, and to all those who could use the policy but are deterred by how it is implemented. It is possible that the patterns I found may exist across the country in different municipalities because when I presented my findings at the British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association 2010 Symposium, several staff from across the province nodded their heads in agreement as I discussed the conflicting values in this work and the major challenges that were revealed in my study (Scott & Cureton, 2010). Further research is needed to determine whether or not the patterns found here are more wide spread. Stewart et al. (2008) argue that “for leisure research to be more effective at social change, open discussion of values and ideology about leisure are needed” (p. 365). This relates to one of the recommendations that came out of this study where staff felt they needed to revisit the organizational philosophy that governs their work, reflect on the values, and refocus on the significance of leisure access. I agree that this is an important change that needs to happen in order to improve support for this type of work.

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INFORMATION AND CONSENT SHEET: FOR A STUDY OF THE VALUES AND CHALLENGES IN LEISURE ACCESS WORK IN MUNICIPAL RECREATION.

Brief Description of the Study: The purpose of my research is to investigate municipal recreation staff responsible for providing recreation opportunities for people living on low incomes negotiate their work within the dominance of market-driven politics. Specifically, I am interested in studying the values that underlie leisure access work and how challenges are related to these values. I am also interested in exploring the reasons why this work is commonly done by women.

The hope of this study is to address a gap in the academic literature by drawing on the perspectives of municipal recreation staff to uncover multiple values, challenges, and experiences of leisure access work in order to develop a more thorough understanding of the complexities involved in this work.

The study will be conducted through the School of Human Kinetics in the Faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia (UBC). ***This study is part of a graduate degree*** and will be carried out by Kathryn Cureton, a Master of Arts student, under the supervision of Professor Wendy Frisby.

The Interview and Your Participation: Personal interviews with individuals who are responsible for leisure access within a Vancouver community center will be conducted by Kathryn Cureton and will last between 1 and 2 hours. The interviews will discuss your role in leisure access, your perception of the values that guide this work, and the challenges you encounter while doing this work. The interviews will be audio-recorded.

Confidentiality: You have been chosen for this study because of your role with leisure access. Your name and that of the community center where you work will not be referred to in any documents emerging from the completed study. The transcripts from your data will be saved on a password-protected computer and hard copy transcripts and audiotapes will be securely locked in a cabinet. All data will be kept at UBC.

Voluntary Participation: ***There are no personal benefits to your participation in the study.*** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to refrain from answering any question(s) during the interview process or to withdraw from the interview at any time. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the ***Research Subject Information Line (RSIL) in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or by email at RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.***

Additional Contact Information: Should you have questions or require additional information regarding the research project, please contact the Student-Investigator Kathryn Cureton at or the Principal Investigator Dr. Wendy Frisby at .

Consent

I have read the above information and understand the nature of the study.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

I hereby agree to the above stated conditions and consent to participate in this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form and agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

Appendix B

Sample Interview Guide

1. Tell me about how you have come to work in municipal recreation.
2. Can you tell me about the job you are doing now and your role with leisure access?
 - i. What is your job title?
 - ii. Is this full-time, part-time, or contract work?
 - iii. Who do you report to? Is there more than one person?
3. I define leisure access as providing recreation opportunities for low income. What is your approach to this? What do you think about providing opportunities for those who can't afford to pay full fees?
4. Does your centre use the LAC? Do you offer additional subsidies for your programs or in addition to the LAC?
5. Can people get assistance here from the front desk staff to fill out the LAC forms?
6. Can you talk about what makes leisure access work tough? Can you give me some examples?
 - i. How do resources affect your work? Do you have a large budget to work with? Are there other staff helping you?
 - ii. Do you ever encounter people or attitudes that don't support leisure access work? Can you think of any examples? If so, how does that affect your work?
Probe – How do you deal with that?
7. In order to be eligible for the LAC, a family's total income has to fall below the low income cut-off line. What are your thoughts on that and your experience enforcing that requirement?
8. Are there any differences between how the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, the community centres, and you approach leisure access? If so, how does this affect your ability to do leisure access work?
9. What changes to leisure access, if any, do you think are necessary to improve access to recreation for citizens living on low incomes? What would it take for these changes to occur?
10. Is it mostly women who do leisure access work? If so, why do you think that is?

Closing Questions

1. Are you interested in the focus group?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C

Sample Focus Group Guide

1. Welcome/Thank-you

2. Introductions

-Name, job title, where you work

2. The goals of today's focus group

3. Guidelines for the focus group

4. Themes - *The following are the main themes that came from the information I learned during the interviews:*

BACKGROUND

- i) Leisure access work is important
- ii) Leisure access work varies
- iii) Leisure access work can be complex

COMMON CONCERN/FRUSTRATION

- iv) lack of resources
- v) working with current policy
- vi) LAC program may not be serving the people in Vancouver who really need it/frustrations with 'abuse'
- vii) inconsistency

Do these themes speak to the work that you do and adequately address the challenges of doing leisure access work?

5. DILEMMAS – Need help clarifying

- i) LAC a privilege?
- ii) Consistency vs. Flexibility
- iii) How do you ward off 'abusers' while not stigmatizing the program?

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) LAC offered in different languages
- ii) Consult and listen to front line staff
- iii) Make it simpler for the public
- iv) Nominal fee
- v) Revisit the philosophy – What is it that we're trying to achieve?

Any other recommendations?

Who should these recommendations go to?

Master Code	Sub Codes	Descriptive codes
Neoliberal values	1) E. Individualization 1) F. Accountability 1) G. Efficiency	1g) 1 people should take more responsibility for themselves 1g) 2 stereotyping/judging people on low incomes 1g) 3 ignoring structures that create barriers for people living on low incomes 1g) 4 refusing to help people with the LAC application 1g) 5 recreation participation is affordable 1g) 6 not helping with translation when able to 1g) 7 LAC is a privilege 1g) 8 it's not our responsibility 1g) 9 onus is on individual to say they need help 1g) 10 suggests the LAC program has a negative stigma attached to it 1g) 11 "A lot of leisure access clients don't value it because they don't pay for it." 1h) 1 restricting advertising for leisure access 1h) 2 abiding by strict eligibility requirements 1h) 3 turning people away because their income is above LICO 1h) 4 turning people away because they were missing proof of residency 1h) 5 wanting tighter controls/policing 1h) 6 keep leisure access stats to prove why revenue is low 1h) 7 checking up on number of people living in a household (processing level) 1i) 1 make sure all necessary paperwork is included in application 1i) 2 pressure to do more with less 1i) 3 emphasis on bottom line/breaking even 1i) 4 limiting subsidies 1i) 5 offer subsidies only if program is financially stable 1i) 6 leisure access work takes too much time; time is money 1i) 7 financial pressures 1i) 8 leisure access is a cost or loss of revenue 1i) 9 low cost services used to make money 1i) 10 participation linked to decreased strain on health care system 1i) 11 pride in revenue generation 1i) 12 revenue generation is sufficient to run programs but we have low LAC usage 1i) 13 more people in pools means more cost 1i) 14 cannot offer additional subsidies 1i) 15 want more consistency across system

RQ#2 – What are the major challenges in leisure access and how are they work tied to social liberal and neoliberal values?		
Master Code	Sub Codes	Descriptive codes
Working within a policy framework	<p>2) A. Consistency and rules (tied to NLB)</p> <p>2) B. Flexibility (tied to SLB)</p>	<p>2a) 1 having to turn people away who are on the borderline of eligibility</p> <p>2a) 2 having to deny the LAC to families who share a house with relatives (which makes their total family income above the LICO)</p> <p>2a) 3 trying to communicate the eligibility requirements to the public (educational component)</p> <p>2a) 4 working with language barriers</p> <p>2a) 5 wanting more guidelines regarding LAC procedures</p> <p>2a) 6 wanting more consistency in the way the LAC is administered across the city</p> <p>2a) 7 wanting more “checks and balances” to make sure only those who need the LAC are the ones who get it</p> <p>2a) 8 “there is no simple, fool-proof method to demonstrate true income”</p> <p>2a) 9 getting in trouble for enforcing the policy verbatim</p> <p>2a) 10 difficult having consistency in such a large organization</p> <p>2a) 11 feeling frustrated that other CCs do not abide strictly to the rules outlined in the policy</p> <p>2b) 1 there are always questions/exceptions; lots of gray areas</p> <p>2b) 2 “it’s really difficult to say no”</p> <p>2b) 3 some people do not have the proper documentation that is required</p> <p>2b) 4 “you don’t always see or know the situation of these individuals”</p> <p>2b) 5 variety of needs in community</p> <p>2b) 6 want to be able to address social issues as well</p> <p>2b) 7 wanting to meet needs but being limited by a tight budget</p>
Reaching people who need leisure access services	<p>2) C. People who need the service are not accessing it</p> <p>2) D. People who do not appear to need the service are taking advantage of it</p>	<p>2c) 1 limited advertising</p> <p>2c) 2 type of advertising</p> <p>2c) 3 the LAC misses a segment of the population</p> <p>2c) 4 welcoming people on low incomes without stigmatizing the program</p> <p>2c) 5 word of mouth is that LAC is “free pass”</p> <p>2c) 6 communicating the objective of the program in an effective way</p> <p>2c) 7 “there’s other people who need it but don’t know how to get it”</p> <p>2c) 8 working poor</p> <p>2d) 1 witnessing perceived abuse is frustrating for frontline staff</p> <p>2d) 2 feel that abuse is unfair to or takes away from those who really need the LAC</p> <p>2d) 3 original suspicion of abuse proven wrong; person really needed help</p> <p>2d) 4 the system is open to abuse; “people are finding loopholes”</p> <p>2d) 5 accepting that there is always going to be some level of abuse</p> <p>2d) 6 feel that abuse of LAC is unfair to those who struggle to pay the full rate</p>

Master Code	Sub Codes	Descriptive codes
Reaching people who need leisure access services (cont...)	2) D. People who do not appear to need the service are taking advantage of it (cont...)	2d) 7 Park Board/management do not recognize it as a big deal 2d) 8 not a major concern at some community centres 2d) 9 “because people are abusing this system, we don’t have the resources” 2d) 10 Mercedes/BMW, Gucci purse, and the Visa Gold card 2d) 11 counter arguments for abuse
Resistance to change	2) E. Not enough resources (tied to NLB) 2) F. Exclusionary power (tied to NLB) 2) G. Personal approaches to leisure access work	2e) 1 it all comes down to money 2e) 2 expense of running large facilities 2e) 3 under pressure to do more with less 2e) 4 reduction in government grants 2e) 5 local cut-backs 2e) 6 pressure to be fiscally responsible 2e) 7 subsidies for kids, not adults 2e) 8 don’t want to spend money on a system that doesn’t make money 2e) 9 a review would cost a lot of money 2e) 10 one-on-one leisure access counselling would be too costly 2e) 11 only one person working in the LAC office at a time 2f) 1 positional power – staff not in a position to make change 2f) 2 positional power – staff not in a position to make leisure access decisions 2f) 3 positional power – “I don’t have the power to do anything” (frontline staff) 2f) 4 agenda setting power – Park Board commissioners are decision makers 2f) 5 agenda setting power – community association board has clout 2f) 6 agenda setting power – change would have to come from ‘higher up’ 2f) 7 power of dialogue - frontline staff must do as instructed; no questions asked 2f) 8 power of dialogue – frontline staff are not consulted regarding leisure access 2f) 9 power of dialogue – struggling to be heard 2g) 1 frontline staff can be judgemental 2g) 2 trying to train frontline staff to be helpful and welcoming 2g) 3 “it’s a struggle always to make sure that everybody understands the basic philosophy of what we are all about and what we are trying to achieve” 2g) 4 need for philosophical questions – why are we doing this work? 2g) 5 “people need to be more tolerant” 2g) 6 depends on attitude of staff

RQ#3 –How do municipal recreation staff negotiate leisure access work under neoliberal constraints?	
Sub Codes	Descriptive codes
3) A. Accept powerlessness (hidden power)	3a) 1 “there’s nothing I can do, it’s my job” 3a) 2 “it’s not up to me... we have our borders to follow” 3a) 3 learn to cope
3) B. SLB/NLB hybrid approach	3b) 1 fundraising/donations for fitness equipment in free fitness centre 3b) 2 raise revenues in other areas to negate cutbacks and high LAC use 3b) 3 be creative in offsetting financial losses around leisure access 3b) 4 seek grants to be able to offer low/no cost services 3b) 5 setting money aside for subsidies 3b) 6 feeling satisfied to accept LACs with no questions
3) C. Maintain a positive approach	3c) 1 good experiences outweigh the bad experiences 3c) 2 doing it for the community 3c) 3 faith in the community 3c) 4 feel supported by the organization (Vancouver Park Board) 3c) 5 “I believe in the system” 3c) 6 refusing to let bad experiences change one’s approach to leisure access 3c) 7 “there are the good stories that keep you going” 3c) 8 look for opportunities to give feedback about the program
3) D. Struggle	3d) 1 finding it difficult to balance the good and bad experiences 3d) 2 feeling constrained by the budget 3d) 3 feeling very frustrated with a high amount of abuse 3d) 4 have to spend time working on the budget over other community-focussed jobs like programming 3d) 5 not feeling supported by fellow staff/management/Park Board/other community centres
3) E. Revert to a negative approach	3e) 1 bad experiences make people cynical 3e) 2 bad experiences stick with people 3e) 3 “you remember the one jerk” 3e) 4 we forget why we’re doing what we do 3e) 5 “when you see abuse on a daily basis... you get a little frustrated with it” 3e) 6 “perception that people are taking advantage of the system”



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Wendy Frisby	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Human Kinetics	UBC BREB NUMBER: H09-00110
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution	Site	
UBC	Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)	
Other locations where the research will be conducted: For phase 1 of the research (the interviews), the location will be determined by the subject. The goal is for the subject to be comfortable in the location, and to be in a location that is convenient to both the participant and the researcher. Sites will include the participant's office, a private room in the participant's workplace, a university office, a university classroom or conference room, and a public location of the subject's choice. For phase 2 (the focus group), the site will be a quiet room on the university campus, like a classroom or seminar room.		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): N/A		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: Leisure Access Work in a Neoliberal Era: Perspectives of Municipal Recreation Staff		

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: July 23, 2010

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:	DATE APPROVED: July 23, 2009	
Document Name	Version	Date
Consent Forms:		
Consent Form	1.2	July 16, 2009
Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:		
Sample Interview Guide	1.1	June 30, 2009
Sample Focus Group Guide	1.0	June 24, 2009
Letter of Initial Contact:		
Letter of initial contact	1.1	June 29, 2009
Other Documents:		
Agency Approval	1.1	June 29, 2009

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

**Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
and signed electronically by one of the following:**

 Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
 Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
 Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
 Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
 Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair