

Shifting Hegemony in “a man’s world”: Incremental Change for Female Golf Professional Employment

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Abstract:

There is much evidence to suggest that the golf environment is unequal in terms of gender. This study examines female golf professionals’ understanding of the barriers and opportunities to employment in the golf industry. Data was collected through a series of focus groups, interviews [n = 17] and a survey [n=95] with female PGA Professionals and trainee PGA Professionals in Great Britain and Ireland, over half of whom indicated coaching as their primary employment role. At the time of data collection female PGA golf professionals made up 2.75% of all PGA Professionals in Britain and Ireland. The data revealed some clear differences between older and younger respondents on barriers to, and opportunities for, employment in the golf industry. On the whole, younger professionals appeared more willing to challenge, discuss and confront the underlying discrimination. The results suggest that golf is undergoing an incremental change away from male hegemony.

Keywords: employment, females, golf, hegemony, incremental change.

Introduction

Academic literature on the golf sector focuses mainly on the tourism and economic significance of golf (Golf Business Community 2013a; 2013b), golf and globalisation (Stoddart 2006), the biomechanical principles of the golf swing and equipment and the environmental implications of golf course manufacture (Wheeler and Nauright 2006). Little attention has been paid to the cultural aspects of the golf industry and golf clubs. In view of its long history, conservative image, explicit norms and class-associated practices, the social and cultural practices of golf clubs offer rich potential for sociological and political investigation (Perkins *et al.* 2010). Linked to its historical and traditional propensities, the culture of golf and its environment in Great Britain and Ireland is widely regarded as male dominated, exclusionary and discriminatory. The history of golf dating to 16th century Scotland details instances where females were shunned from the golf course, and restricted to secret games involving little more than putting (George 2009; 2010; Vamplew 2010). The effects of golf's tradition are far reaching today, as many golf clubs in Great Britain and Ireland still preclude female participants. Golf participation figures evidence the low visibility of females while golf club constitutions still limit the involvement of females, thus replicating an environment that valorises male presence and can be highly discriminatory and isolating for female participants. It is not just on the fairways that female participants are rarely seen, but the golf industry's governance, administration and service provision is largely male dominated too, making it difficult for female professionals to gain employment and forge careers. This study seeks to examine and understand female golf professionals' experiences in male-dominated golf settings, and their perceptions of the support, barriers and opportunities to employment in the golf industry.

With the growth of professional golf tours in Europe and America, wide-ranging television coverage, endorsement deals with iconic figures and its (re)inclusion as an Olympic sport, golf is a major player in global sport. Modern technology and the process of globalisation have helped transform golf into a lucrative industry of major economic and social significance. The golf course is more than just a place to play; it is a business empire, a tourist attraction, a meeting place, a venue for weekly televised events and, with the growth of real estate on golf facilities or compounds, many have made the golf course their home (Stoddart 2006). The golf industry is a worldwide employer in the areas of tourism, course design and architecture, green-keeping, management, retail and golf coaching. Employers in golf include manufacturers of equipment, apparel and machinery, distributors and retailers of golf equipment, golf course designers and architects, and roles include golf club administrators, green-keepers and service staff, golf event staff and golf coaches. Golf in Europe is responsible for a minimum of 180,000 full time jobs, with 78,900 of these in Great Britain and Ireland, while a recent report suggested that golf in

Scotland supports 20,000 people in employment, or 0.8% of overall employment (Golf Business Community 2013b; Professional Golfers Association, 2013). Much of the golf industry workforce in Great Britain and Ireland comprise of PGA golf professionals, who, rather than professional golfers, are the retail, equipment and coaching specialists who are trained to Foundation Degree level through the Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) at the Belfry, England. The PGA provides formal and informal education to trainee and fully qualified PGA Professionals, supporting them to maintain high standards of service and participant satisfaction in golf. For the purposes of this study, the authors collected data from female trainee and fully qualified PGA professionals.

Female representation in the sports industry

Research has confirmed the under-representation and marginalisation of female participants, coaches and employees in sports environments. In their latest release on female presence as athletes, coaches and administrators in US collegiate sport, Acosta and Carpenter (2014) record that about 1 in 4.5 of male and female teams are coached by women, while 11% of collegiate athletic programmes had no females in their administrative structures. In examining the reasons for the lack of women coaches in men's college basketball, Walker and Bopp (2010) found the existence of a glass wall and an old boys' network, where females had to overcompensate and work harder to fit in and gain respect. Access to managerial positions and progression opportunities are limited, where there are far fewer women than men in senior positions in sports organisations. In a study in the Netherlands, Knoppers and Anthonissen (2008) interviewed executive directors (all white, male) from a number of sports organisations and found that the managerial discourses they espoused created a multiplicity of overlapping discourses that they used to keep 'the other' out. Workers' attitudes also negate against female progression in sports organisations; in Turkey Koca et al. (2011) found that both male and female workers had negative attitudes towards women's career advancement, and male workers had more negative attitudes about women's capability to handle work and family responsibilities. Other factors deter women from maintaining and increasing their representation in sports leadership, including a lack of mentoring and role models (Avery et al. 2008), gender-role stereotyping (Burton et al. 2009), and work-family conflict (Cunningham 2008). Collectively, this evidence demonstrates how sports environments are spaces that limit the participation, involvement and employment of women, resulting in their under-representation, marginalisation and the blocking of their career progression.

Female representation in golf

The latest golf participation figures illustrate female participants' low visibility, while female routes into golf are predominantly influenced by male family members. In Great Britain and Ireland female golfers typically comprise less than a fifth of participants (currently 14%), compared with a quarter or even a third in other European countries (England Golf 2014; European Golf Association 2016; Golf Business Community 2013a; Professional Golfers' Association 2013). The 2011 National Golf Census in Australia records female participants as 22% of active golf club members. Among other factors, the census cites cost, time restraints and course restrictions as reasons for the underrepresentation of females (Golf Australia, 2012). Interestingly, despite the recent global decline in golf participation, women are taking up golf in great numbers, however, they leave almost as quickly as they enter (McGinnis et al. 2005). While golf in America declined by 14% between 2005 and 2011, the decrease in female golf participation in the same period was 27%; in 2011 women comprised 20% of all golfers in the US (National Golf Foundation 2012). In terms of female induction to golf the role of family members as gatekeepers to participation is significant. A Ladies Golf Union survey (n=1500), reported that 65% of respondents identified their husbands, partners, parents and other family members as the primary influences in their decision to take up golf, with almost 9 of every 10 golfers surveyed having another member of the household that plays golf (Ladies Golf Union 2005). The low visibility of females in golf settings can bring about a role for fathers, husbands and partners as key influencers and socialisers in the game (Shin and Nam 2004; Reis and Correia 2013). Thus, while female participants are low in number, those who do access golf are strongly influenced by male significant others, further demonstrating male dominance and control in golf settings.

Golf club rules and regulations have been shown to limit the participation of females. Many clubs still classify women as 'associate members', and legislation in some jurisdictions uphold the right of golf clubs to pursue all male memberships, as long as it is written into the club's legal constitution (Song 2007). A SportScotland report (2002) showed that 18% of golf clubs in Scotland did not admit female members. While equality legislation has forced clubs to offer full membership to female members in some countries, Haig-Muir (2004, p.78) reports that with little incentive, few female golf club members in Australia have taken up full membership:

Out-dated practices, systems and structures, and the inflexible attitudes that riddle Australian golf clubs have created a missing generation of female golfers with juniors, students, young married women, and women in the paid workforce all significantly underrepresented. Club golf as it is does not suit these groups...nor does it attract them to the game. Solutions require a major cultural shift: a complete sea change in climates of thought, traditional practices, and, above all, golfing culture.

Some high profile clubs and governing bodies have been caught out in the debate on the presence of females in golf clubs. In spite of media scrutiny and the objections of equality campaigners, the annual US Masters venue August National took a traditional stance (Nylund 2003) until recently, when the club admitted its first female members, former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Darla Moore, vice-president of Rainwater Inc. While other high profile clubs such as the R&A in Scotland are now admitting females, some well-known clubs such as Muirfield in Scotland and, despite an enduring court case, Portmarnock in Ireland, continue to pursue all male memberships.

Given the evidence presented it is hardly surprising that research has conveyed the discriminatory environment of golf for female practitioners and players of all ability levels. Ethnographic research by Shotton et al. (1998) on the gender influences on the social behaviour of members at a private golf club showed that although it was not an overt practice, gender discrimination against female members was an ever present characteristic in the club. Gender discrimination does not end once a female gains access to golf club membership, and female golfers have identified and experienced the institutional barriers that shape their participation in golf. In conducting interviews with recreational female golfers, McGinnis et al. (2005) found that women reported heightened experiences of typecasting in golf settings, where they felt ignored, overlooked or unimportant. Gaining the coaches' perspective, McGinnis and Gentry (2006) found that female golfers face constraints related to ability, lack of knowledge, peer and family performance expectations and prevailing gender norms, all of which affect their continued participation. They cited examples of how golf personnel and professionals used condescending language and actions that create an unwelcoming environment for women, where factors such as tokenism, sensible business practice, traditional politeness and the old-boys-network serve to perpetuate the gender gap in golf participation (McGinnis and Gentry 2006). Todd Crosset's (1995) ethnography on the American LPGA (Ladies' Professional Golf Association) tour revealed how LPGA tour players experienced tensions between their roles as athletes and societal expectations of them as females. As Crosset suggests, female golfers remain outsiders in what is considered the masculine world of golf.

Not only are the fairways void of female participants, but governance, administration and service provision in the golf industry is largely homogenous, where female professionals find it difficult to forge employment and progression opportunities. While a vote has only recently opened up membership to females at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St. Andrew's, women have always been employed there; in a 2007 interview, the Guardian newspaper asked an R&A official how many ethnic minorities filled senior positions within the golf's governing body, to

which he responded 'we have a couple of Chinese girls who work in the clubhouse'. Donegan (2007) commented:

It's a depressing picture for those who want to see the game shake off its reputation as the last bastion of white, middle-class privilege...critics would suggest the R&A is duty-bound to tackle insidious racism in golf clubs that has kept ethnic minorities out of the game for decades. But then perhaps too much is expected from an organisation that, in 2007, refuses to have women members.

At the time of data collection female PGA golf professionals made up 2.75% of all PGA Professionals in Britain and Ireland. In America, less than 4% of golf professionals are female (McGinnis 2005), and female PGA of America members are twice as likely as male members to become inactive. For the few females in the industry, there is some evidence of employment and working conditions that are less than ideal. MacKinnon (2013) found family and personal commitments, unsociable working hours and the lack of schedule flexibility as the primary reasons for this attrition of female professionals. Acknowledging the male dominated environment in which golf takes place for female participants and employees, this study examines how female golf professionals cope in these settings, and the nature of support (or otherwise) they receive from key parties in golf settings. By offering a more nuanced account of the experiences of female golf professionals in Great Britain and Ireland it is hoped that new light might be shed on the potential for change in golf environments.

Framework and methods

Taken together, the literature presented above highlights how golf is run by men and mostly for men. The under representation of females as golf participants and employees can imply that their mere presence presents a challenge to the status quo. Regarding golf in Australia, Senyard (1998) comments that gender was used as a way of constructing the social meaning of golf to wider society, while Haig-Muir (1998; 2004) suggests that it has been marked as a male preserve, where the social construction of golf is normatively male and the widespread gender marking of the sport is a strong force in maintaining and legitimating existing patriarchal practices and hierarchies. This privileging of men and men's activities results in the homologous reproduction of traditional gender roles, where women are perceived as less important. In sports organisations, taken for granted norms, values, and assumptions produce discourses that preserve and normalise the privilege of those already holding power (Cunningham 2008; Knoppers and Anthonissen 2008). The patriarchal presence in golf environments is a strong force in reproducing and reinforcing golf

culture and institutionalised practices that exclude and marginalise females, and above all, is highly resistant to change. Taking into account the broad socio-historical and political context of golf, a critical perspective is adopted in this study.

Often associated with interpretivism, critical perspectives are concerned with social institutions, underlying social relations, oppressive structures and historical problems of domination and inequality in the attempt to locate the thoughts and actions of individuals and groups in everyday life (Creswell 2007; Sparkes 1992). McDonald and Birrell (1999) recommend a 'critical sport analysis' perspective as a form of agency that opens up possibilities for the emergence of new actions. Through appraisal of the intersectionality of gender, social class and other social constructs in the context of the golf club, critical theory offers a medium through which the oppression of minority participants and the normalisation of patriarchal power relations can be realised. Derived from critical theory, (critical) feminist perspectives begin with the assumption that sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed and culturally defined to serve the needs and interests of powerful groups in society. Sport is one of the few categories of the social world still unequally arranged by gender, something exacerbated by the mis-match in gender specific media coverage. Only 7% of total media coverage in the UK, for example, is given over to female sport (WSFF, 2014). Equality of opportunity between the genders has been a central argument by feminists in their quest to gain opportunities and resources for girls and women in sport, and discriminatory issues in private sports clubs have often been associated with liberal feminist perspectives which are accused of oversimplifying females' multiple and diversified femininities and dispositions (Scruton and Flintoff 2002). While liberal feminists are interested in inequality, critical feminists write in relation to power, where gender relations often are defined by hegemonic masculinity and supported by cultural norms of male domination and female subordination (Connell 2005). Critical feminism, which acts as an organising principle for this study, recognises the need to consider the influence of power relations in the golf industry on potentially marginalised participants and is committed to producing knowledge that can serve as the basis for social change. As will become clear in the results and discussion below, such a framework acknowledges the dominant (male) hegemonic discourse that is prevalent in golf settings – importantly, it highlights how such a discourse sets the parameters of what is and what is not possible/acceptable for females. Many of the examples offered below are at critical junctures where male hegemonic discourse is encountered, (in part) challenged, accepted or altered through the agency of female golfers. In order to evidence this, our approach chose the most appropriate research methods to elicit female professional golfer's views: focus groups, interviews and a questionnaire to all PGA female professionals.

Methodology and Research Methods

While our guiding principle is critical feminism, the study is informed by what could be termed a 'hard' interpretivist approach. This epistemological approach lies on the border of critical realist and interpretivist epistemology (for further explanation of this, see Authors 2010) and is characterised by seeking to understand not only the beliefs and attitudes of female professionals in the golf industry, but also through considering the impact that structures have on these beliefs and attitudes (Authors, 2010). This has ramifications for what the study seeks to uncover and how the data is gathered (see Marsh and Furlong 2002, 18). The intention is not to produce a 'representative' or statistically significant study, rather, the article uses a case study of professional female golfers of varying ages in order to illustrate and contribute to the broader literature surrounding women in sport.

The data was derived from 5 individual, in-depth interviews with qualified female PGA Professionals and two focus groups of 6 (12 in total) all of whom were female trainee PGA Professionals studying for the Applied Golf Management Studies degree (years 1-3) at the University of Birmingham. In addition, a survey was sent out to all female professionals and trainee professionals of the Professional Golfers Association of Great Britain and Ireland (a total of 300 with a return of 95 fully filled-out questionnaires). Thus, 17 interviewees and 95 survey responses offer an insight into a generational cross-section of women golfers' 'voice'. The questions and structure of the survey were informed by the themes arising from the focus groups and individual interviews. Prior to distribution, the survey was reviewed, cleared and consented by The PGA and represents the first study of its kind.

Given that the study was situated within a 'hard' interpretivist framework which guided data collection and data analysis, the data collected rendered an interpretation of participant's constructed meaning of the golf industry and the barriers and opportunities to their employment within it. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for comparison across the cohort, but enough room for the development of other themes not set out and 'imposed' by the researchers. Through several readings of the interview data by all individuals in the research team and subsequent meetings together the role of three distinct groups in maintaining or challenging the male-dominated status quo were selected for analysis: male members and patrons; female members and patrons and work colleagues and employers. A final section asks whether we have witnessed a 'shifting hegemony' in the direction of a more equal workplace for women.

Results and discussion

The average age of the survey respondents in this study was 39 with the vast majority of respondents white (white British 80%; white Irish 11%; white other 7%), a figure similar to that recorded by Sport England (1%) for general participation in golf by citizens from non-white backgrounds (Sport England, 2011). Some 83% of survey respondents were fully qualified PGA professionals with an average of 9 years post qualification experience, while 17% of respondents were in training at the time of data collection. All of the focus group attendees (12) were trainees, while all individual interviewees (5) were qualified golf professionals, with an average of twenty years post qualification experience.

The low visibility of females was evident throughout the data and in a variety of situations, from playing to training and employment. Some participants represented the only female in their clubs [S50], others complained that golf course architecture is ‘set up for men’ [S16] and others commented that they had no female instructors at any point of their training [S16]. In terms of their routes into golf, female professionals involved in this study were mostly influenced by family and friends in their decisions to start golf and choose golf as a career. Survey respondents were asked to identify who or what influenced their decision to play golf and of the 82 respondents to the question, most were influenced by family (71) and friends (11), while others were influenced by teachers/coaches (6) and golf organisations/initiatives (3). Some of the respondents (33) elaborated on who these key influencers or significant others were, and, confirming the evidence from the literature, fathers (10), brothers (6) and both parents (4) were the most common:

I got involved because my dad...Well he joined me when I was a baby at the golf club, put me on the waiting list, don't know how he knew that I wanted to play. [FG2 comment]

...he was joining a new club and made me go with him just because he thought I'd enjoy it and that's why I started playing, because of my dad. [FG1 comment]

Yeah I started...before I played golf I used to caddy for my father, my father was a good player, [...] so when I first started swinging a club it was just copying what I had watched every weekend when I caddied really. [II – Mary]

I started playing with my boyfriend, now my husband, who has been a great influence in all that I have accomplished. [II – Brenda]

Four respondents alluded to their fathers being PGA professionals, with one of these commenting “my grandfather [named], father [named] and uncle [named], all PGA professionals” [S75]. Of the 11 focus group attendees all were introduced to golf by a male, 9 by a father (2 of whom were professionals, 1 of whom worked in golf), 1 by an uncle and 1 by a brother. Of the individual

interviewees, all had a male involved in their initiation, 3 by a father, 1 by both parents and 1 by a boyfriend. Thus, males played a significant role in introducing both the older and younger generation of golfers to the game.

The presentation of golf environments as hegemonic male-dominated spaces is evidenced throughout the data. Survey respondents (77) identified a number of barriers that exist for female golf professionals, in particular, the presentation, play and administration of golf in “a man’s world” (22). Also identified were the attitudes and commentary from older clubs and male clients, members and professionals (14), the assumption of the PGA Professional as male only (12) and the improbability of female professionals getting top jobs or promotions (11). Our data across the generations of golfers is full of examples of trivial sounding aspects of discrimination such as access and rights within golf facilities and on the golf course, demonstrating how archaic regulations restrict or confine females within golf environments. The following is indicative of the structures of male hegemony at work in golf – this is, of course, accompanied by a discourse in which female golfers are marginalised. On arriving at a golf club the structural nature of gender inequality is immediately apparent as one interviewee suggested:

The main entrance of the club is either going into the pro shop or the men’s changing room so [as a female] you can’t actually access the bar or anything through the main entrance, you have to walk round the back. [FG1 comment]

Perhaps even more pertinent for an Olympic sport in the 21st century is the story of Mary which sheds light on the archaic traditions of golf that manage to live on today when she recalls:

...I can remember one of the first times I ever played there, I was playing with Tom [pseudonym], we came up to the eighteenth green, I had my clubs on a trolley and I started taking my trolley round the right hand side of the green which happened to be in front of the men’s patio or the patio at the clubhouse, Tom came rushing after me and said, “You can’t go round that way.” And I said, “What do you mean I can’t come round the green this way?” He said, “You’re not allowed, women aren’t allowed to walk in front of the men’s patio.” And that wasn’t that long ago [II – Mary]

Other participants recalled not being allowed to even physically go down the drive of a golf club on a Saturday – with one interviewee stating that they had to seek ‘special permission to work on a Saturday...there was a separate ladies club and ladies weren’t allowed down the drive until after 4 o’clock on a Saturday when I worked there...’ [II – Katherine]. This is not the first time that physical barriers such as the lack of access and archaic out-of-date practices have been evidenced by females in golf settings. It was even suggested by two of the older professionals that some men would prefer male only environments. McGinnis et al. (2005) suggest that these barriers are disappearing but profound social and psychological barriers and constraints remain. As evidenced

later, the combination of these physical barriers and the socially constructed discourse that constrains female golfers in what they can and cannot do in a golf setting. With this confirmation of the patriarchal and hegemonic nature of golf settings, using the critical feminist framework we aim to investigate the potential for change in these environments, with a focus on the nature of support (or otherwise) offered to female professionals by key parties in golf. These key parties were identified as (1) male members and patrons, (2) female members and patrons, (3) fellow PGA professionals and (4) employers in the golf industry.

Male members and patrons

There was a mixed level of support from male members and patrons for female golfers and professionals. As mentioned earlier, males have an important part to play as role models and socialisers in supporting females to take up the game. Overwhelmingly, however, the data portrays male patrons admonishing females on the course and demeaning female professionals' knowledge and expertise, all of which protects their perceived superior position in golf settings. McGinnis et al. (2005) use the concept of social closure to highlight the practices that male players engage in to protect their privilege on the golf course and exclude those who do not live up to the golfer ideal. The restricted access that females experienced in golf settings was sometimes accompanied by confrontation. Trainee professionals identified numerous examples of such, including being left in the rain while a male member collected a code for the ladies' entrance [FG2 comment], not being allowed anywhere near the men's golf course [ibid.], or being severely admonished by male golfers for playing on the men's course (with permission) [FG1; II – Susan]. During focus group 1 the trainees discussed the collective experience that they had at a tournament:

R1: There's another one where the ladies...aren't allowed to go and walk around the front, they have to walk around the back of the clubhouse...

R2: That's a men's only bar isn't it? Because when we walked in the members were like...

R3: "What are you doing here? Get out."

R4: ...that's where we had to get our score cards...and so then they put a notice up on the door that said, 'Now temporarily a mixed bar.' But the look we got, if looks could kill. "What are you doing in this bar?"

Excluding women from access to the course, times and places, decision making and demeaning their presence on the course makes many feel unwelcome, undeserving, isolated and thus more likely to drop out or leave the setting. Female professionals commented that male clients and members have low expectations of females in golf and many presented female golfers as

inadequate. Two of the older professionals spoke of the image of women golfers in some clubs as playing ‘slowly and poorly’ or even some people believing that ‘...women shouldn’t play golf’ [II – Brenda; II – Mary respectively]. Susan commented:

...they do feel pressure that they’re hurried around the golf course, guys with their hands on their hips stood behind them and they feel a little bit belittled by just the presence of guys on the golf course sometimes...[II – Susan]

Evidence has been gathered on female golfers’ on-course inferiority and interactions with male golfers. In conducting interviews with recreational female golfers McGinnis et al. (2005) reported that women felt ignored or unimportant on the golf course. McGinnis and Gentry (2006) found that female golfers were treated less favourably by male course staff, while male golfers hurried female players along the course by their use of body language, e.g. folding arms, sending strong unwelcoming signals that women were unnecessarily slow. Further, male professionals in this study commented that they often fielded complaints and questions from male patrons about women’s slow play. The pervasive male culture and the sense of being overlooked or marginalised because of their gender did not just exist for participants, but for female professionals of all levels of experience in the workplace.

Unrepentant commentary outlined the lesser expectations that some members had of female participants and professionals. This ranged from ‘women [being] seen as maybe less superior than men in golf’ [FG2 comment], through to sexist comments from a tournament sponsor (male) who said ‘... “you should be in the kitchen cooking” or “having babies”...’ [II – Audrey]. Some commentary was seen as derogatory, usually coming from older and younger generations, members and officials, and sometimes focused on the sexualisation of female golfers and professionals. Sexist comments and behaviour was attributed to male golfers, officials within the golf governing body (‘...I can’t tell you how many comments he made and he didn’t even know he was doing it to me about women in my presence, it was so patronising’ [II – Mary]) and elderly (male) club members:

When I was at one club...and I wasn’t wearing anything bad, black trousers and t-shirt and some of the old men are quite creepy, come and put their arm around you, saying “You’re gorgeous”. [FG2 comment]

These attitudes were often driven by male customers and clients, some of whom treated female professionals as if they were invisible. A number of cases were cited where female professionals working in the pro shop were overlooked, mistaken for a shop worker [S78] or simply brushed aside with “Oh don’t worry, I’ll just wait for one of the boys.” [FG1 comment]. Men behind the counter, however, were immediately assumed to be a golf professional [S12]. People telephoning

the pro shop would automatically assume that the female professional is a helper, asking “Can I talk to the golf pro?” [II – Susan]. Other patrons questioned the knowledge, skills and qualifications of female professionals, assuming them to be less than their male counterparts. Susan [III] offers a classic example of this in her short vignette:

People used to come into the pro shop and they would say “Could you get David to repair this for me?” – And I would say, “yes, no problem”, and then I would diligently with my creative head on go into the back of the shop, get all my repair tools out and make this club look absolutely beautiful and they would come back a week after and say “that’s fantastic, could you thank David for me?”, and I would say “well actually...I did it”... [II – Susan]

Thus, while male family members and friends have an important role in introducing females to golf, this data illustrates the attitudes and approaches adopted by many males to uphold their dominance in golf settings.

Female members and patrons

There were varying opinions on the support of female members, officials and fellow professionals given to the community of female golfers and professionals. While some professionals considered females as central to their progression in the industry, 55% of our survey respondents suggested that females had no influence on their career choice. Survey respondents were asked to comment on the influence of females on their development as golfers. Of the 82 respondents to the question, some were influenced by female coaches (16), female club members (15), other junior girls or female competitors (14), tour players (13), female officials (9) and mothers/grandmothers (6). While a number of respondents felt welcomed by other female members of their golf clubs (S32; S72; FG1), some 21 respondents stated that females had little or no influence on their development as golfers, for example:

There was little to no female influence in my golf. Unfortunately there were no other junior girls in my club and so I played my golf with the male juniors. Females in the club were very hesitant to play with a female junior. [S7]

In exploring the reasons why gender gaps in golf settings are maintained, McGinnis and Gentry (2002) found that female cohesion was an important strategy in continued participation, where females sought out fellow females in the golf club setting as playing partners or advisors. However, our data reveals that some female club members gave little or no encouragement during the development of young girl golfers, and some even made efforts to exclude younger players altogether. One respondent recalled female encouragement ‘to a certain extent’, however, often it

was the ‘very strict, old female players at club level’ that can make younger players feel unwelcome [S9]. This needs to be borne in mind when considering the pervasive male-dominance of golf and golf settings, for it appears that a certain cohort of (usually older) women golf members are ‘...as bad as the men...it’s funny, men like good golfers, women don’t like good golfers, they see them more as a threat...’ [II – Katherine; also, FG1; S9]. The latter sentiment is confirmed by a trainee professional who suggests that female members are generally helpful at the beginning, but as she improved her game and was better than the older members, they were less helpful [FG1]. Another trainee professional suggested that female members did not support weekend playing rights for students or working female members who couldn’t play on the designated ladies’ day midweek:

I’m classed as a weekend person because I’ve always been at school or doing something in the week and when they’ve been trying to get more playing rights at the weekend...some of the weekday members...don’t think that that’s right and they should still only have their Tuesdays. [FG2 comment]

Discussing her participation as a junior girl in a senior club, Katherine mentioned how she could play for all the ladies’ teams but couldn’t play in the ladies’ friendly matches in the club until she was eighteen. When she turned eighteen she put her name down for the matches and subsequently:

...got a phone call saying, “You can’t play until you’re twenty one, you might not have the conversation that adults want to talk to you about...it’s our relaxation time, we don’t want to be playing with children”, so I never ever played for the club again at any level...they used to change the rules so you had to have a certain handicap to play in a competition so I got to the handicap then they would change the goal all the time, it’s really bizarre. My mom and dad were really good, they used to fight my battles for me bless them, my mom particularly. [II – Katherine]

This lack of encouragement from females is not surprising, given male dominance in golf settings across the generations. McGinnis and Gentry (2006) reported that much of the insensitivity and hostility that female golfers experience actually comes from other female golfers, particularly in competitive scenarios. In their in-depth interviews with 22 women golfers, McGinnis et al. (2009) found that some female participants felt more intimidated by other female golfers than males. Further, in a comparison of historical accounts of female golfers with contemporary Portuguese female golfers, Reis and Correia (2013) found that the exclusion of women in golf settings is supported by females themselves, who tacitly accept their discrimination. McGinnis et al (2005) uses tokenism (usually used in occupations research) to describe how minorities in institutions feel performance pressure, heightened visibility and that they must either fly under the radar or risk typecasting. Women can respond to this by turning against their own group or accepting their isolation by adhering to stereotyping. Rather than eliciting change, there is some evidence of females in golf complying with the status quo; trainee professionals in both focus groups discussed

how female members resisted change in their clubs, commenting on how older female members are happy for things to remain as they are and how it is the younger women who want to 'mix with the guys' [FG1 comment]. McGinnis et al. (2009) reported that 'accommodating' golfers tolerated rather than challenged golf rituals that privileged men. Thus, it appears that the prevailing patriarchy existing in golf environments is not challenged by many female participants, who continue to accept and comply with their lesser position in the golf environment.

Work colleagues and employers

There is evidence to suggest that male staff, co-workers and male PGA Professionals are also guilty of placing lesser expectations on female professionals. Akin to female participants, female professionals can feel undermined by this perceived inferiority.

...even in a CPD course, I'm always scared, to be honest, to say something in case I make a fool of myself or something because...they're going to go, "Oh she doesn't know what she's talking about"...you're always the only one...the only girl, only woman so that makes it more difficult...I don't necessarily feel threatened, I just feel that I have to be a bit careful really. [II – Audrey]

A female general manager at a golf club, who oversees up to 15 men, is often circumvented by male colleagues who go to the director of golf '...just because they sometimes don't even take her seriously'. [FG1 comment]. The lack of encouragement from females indicated earlier is also visible in the professional support that female professionals give each other, where throughout the data there was little or no mention of the female professionals using female coaches or mentors, with one survey respondent commenting '...personally I have little contact with female professionals and therefore not the opportunity to easily share and compare information' [S16]. Beyond co-workers and fellow golf professionals, employers and decision makers also appear to lack awareness about the ability of female professionals [S72].

Many of the research participants suggested that the expectations of management can limit female professionals' opportunities, progression and promotion in the golf industry. The survey revealed that while the majority of respondents were fully qualified (83%) with an average of nine years post-qualification experience, just 9% of respondents were in management roles:

Opportunities for ladies as head professionals in a club don't exist. They may grant you the courtesy of an interview but a lady will never get the job. [S31]

...the leading positions and senior roles are certainly a challenge to obtain [S57].

I think it's tough to get a head position unless it's a club that already knows you. In some jobs you won't get a chance because of gender and for others it may be seen as an advantage. [S61]

While the survey showed that many respondents had previously worked (71%), or currently work (30%) in private members' golf clubs, these older clubs were viewed by female professionals as much more difficult to gain employment in. In describing these institutions, participants used terms such as "prestigious", "exclusive" and "antiquated". Such settings were unlikely to give jobs to females because of 'tradition' [FG2; II – Katherine], leading Mary to suggest [II] that:

...I can't see Thornden Park any time in the immediate future appointing a woman professional and I think there are lots of clubs like that that are steeped in chauvinism and a very strong men's section... [II – Mary]

In terms of coaching roles, one experienced professional suggested that few female professionals have attained high profile coaching positions, while a younger professional suggested that some coaching roles may be out of reach for female professionals. Audrey [II] points to the fact that no female coach has ever coached any of the 'mega top players'; while one of the professional trainees echoed this by pointing out that she does not know any female that has coached elite men (in golf) [FG2 comment]. In summary, it appears that fellow professionals (both male and female), co-workers and employers offer little in terms of opportunities for change in golf environments.

Shifting hegemony?

Given their qualifications and playing ability, it could be assumed that female professionals are well placed to challenge the status quo. A trainee professional suggested that the lack of expectations and discrimination in golf settings encourages her to work harder, because '...you want to change people's views.' [FG1 comment]. One trainee professional in focus group 1 refused to play in competitions because of the limitations on tee times for women, and her protest resulted in a rule change in the club. Another younger professional was conscious of the influence of their era on the professionals coming after them:

...if we do something like that then for younger people it's going to be easier, if we say something then it's going to be easier for the younger people, the girls that are say thirteen now possibly, when they go through it it's going to be so much easier for them [FG2 comment].

Generally, the trainees appeared more willing to challenge the status quo than the qualified, older professionals, as the following suggests:

I wouldn't ignore it personally I think [sexist comment; authors]...I'd be willing to go and speak to someone about it, not in a forceful way but just maybe ask them why they're being like that and their views on it, just try and say to them its changing a bit and they might need to consider their comments [FG2 comment].

However, there was a clear difference between the generation of younger and older professionals as regards acceptance of the discriminatory environment. There was a reluctance from the qualified professionals to confront discriminatory situations, many of whom had bad experiences leading them to silence and passively accept it as the norm. Katherine suggests that it takes a certain type of woman to challenge the patriarchal environment and that 'girly girls' might be better positioned to do this. Audrey [II] spoke of 'keeping her mouth shut' so as not to get in trouble, as she had before, while Katherine [II] believes there are:

....certain battles you can fight, you have to be in a certain position to be able to fight that kind of battle and I think you have to become more respected to fight the battle from within a little bit [...] I think at some of my jobs I could have definitely taken the hump and had some of the members up on sexual harassment and inappropriate comments but I think you had to ignore it because I'm not sure how much good it does to keep challenging it and I think you have to almost just prove to them by your ability and that's the best way...I won't back away from a situation but I don't think I'd challenge it to be confrontational overly, I think I'd probably be a bit more strategic in how I planned it... [II – Katherine]

One experienced professional spoke about the conditions of female participation as part of the norm, stating that she had 'grown up playing at a club where ladies couldn't play on a Saturday and you could only play after a certain time on a Sunday' – this experience had led to her to accept the situation and '...kind of take it as that's the norm...' [II – Katherine]. It is clear that past experiences have determined the involvement of older professionals as change agents in the sport, whereas younger trainees may have not yet have experienced the closed doors and the lack of opportunities for progression. It is surprising that, with some having experienced isolation and exclusion in golf as young participants, many of the females still chose a career in golf. It is equally surprising that these incidents are experienced by females in the workplace, an environment where they should be protected by law. Aside from Katherine's mention of a female professional taking a club to court over her being overlooked for a professional role, it seems that many female professionals have chosen to ignore the unequal circumstances in which they are employed.

Many of the female professionals were positive about the potential growth and advancement in women's golf, with professional tours key to presenting a positive image of female golf that could, potentially, lead to a gradual shift in male hegemony:

...the game has been publicised more which is good because people have become more aware of the females playing... [FG2 comment]

Having had the like of Annika Sorenstam, Karrie Webb, Se Ri Pak around for the past ten years has shown women's golf in a great light and the various pro tours have grown and flourished in this time. TV exposure has helped to this end. [II – Brenda]

I think certainly women as players are more respected; I think the top women have gained the respect of most male golfers...you have to get men to a women's event to appreciate that women can play good golf and it's an attractive spectacle and it's well worth going to see...[II – Mary]

The experienced professionals believed that the outlook had improved greatly in the past twenty-five years [Audrey – II], with some clubs changing [II – Katherine] and women's status in clubs improving [Brenda - II]. However, this progress is slow to reach golf settings and local golf environments, and the evidence in the data suggests that change is slowed down particularly in older clubs by both males and females, key decision makers and staff, many of whom appear complicit with the patriarchal environment created.

The male oriented culture personified throughout this data demonstrates the power struggle that is clearly detrimental to female positioning and progression in golf. The framing of golf as a male preserve means that women golfers can be viewed as different or unexpected. As evidenced in the lack of female participants in golf since its early days in Scotland, the resultant cultural reproduction is central to the low visibility and presence of females and can last generations, contributing to fewer female employees, coaches, managers, professionals and participants in golf settings. Access and rights discrimination in golf settings and on the course supplement the prevailing patriarchy, where male members and patrons sometimes blatantly suppress female involvement. The low expectations of male members, along with those of employers and club committees, compromises the opportunities for progression and promotion that females experience. McGinnis et al. (2005) describe this phenomenon as statistical discrimination, where an individual stereotype becomes misapplied to the group, and individuals in that group are treated as if they possess those qualities and characteristics, regardless of their individual abilities. As a result, females will constantly struggle to reach upper echelons of the golf industry, e.g. management positions. Further, the complicity and acceptance of female patrons does little to challenge the prevailing culture. Throughout the data it is clear that male hegemonic discourses are consistently encountered by female professionals, but aside from the agency exemplified by the trainee professionals, these discourses remain by and large unchallenged and unaltered. This evidence of the incremental pace of change suggests that it could take generations before females gain a stronger position in golf in Britain and Ireland.

Conclusion

Three significant points arise from our research. First, female professional golfers across generations experience the golf setting as a male-dominated and ‘sexist environment’ (S10); second, this impacts both the number of women participating in golf and the likelihood that more female role models will emerge who could inspire future generations of female golfers to play. Third, the persistence of golf as a male preserve leads to the by-passing of the skills and contributions of those who make up half of society which could greatly enrich golfing culture. While our tentative findings indicate that the younger generation of female golf professionals are gradually challenge the prevailing male hegemonic environment in the sport, talk of a shifting hegemony may be a little premature. Golf remains – in terms of gender equality and in comparison with many other sports – one of the most backwards sport disciplines. Change is likely to come in the form of the trinity of a younger generation of female golfers, equity legislation and financial necessity.

As indicated earlier, the golf industry is a significant employer in Great Britain and Ireland. Female presence in this sector is important, particularly if the model of ‘family golf’ is pursued from both tourism and participation perspectives. Whether coaxed or otherwise by government, it is clear that golf has experienced change, where gender segregated golf governing bodies in mainland Britain have recently (and some might consider reluctantly) elected to amalgamate, forming the Golf Union of Wales (2007), England Golf (2012) and Scottish Golf (2014). While these changes have taken place, our data illustrates the challenges that exist to grassroots or local golf, where archaic regulations, policies and attitudes continue to marginalise and isolate female players and professionals. Further, individual clubs and golf establishments are mostly unbound by the practices of golf governing bodies. Thus any recommendations and good practice initiatives would be inconsistently applied across clubs. Going by the recent global economic downturn and the resultant worldwide decline in golf participation, financial constraints in golf settings could prove more fruitful in opening doors and eliciting change out of economic necessity.

While changes in policies and practices at club level could afford females a more supportive setting in which to take part in golf, governmental interventions, the strengthening of equality legislation around sports clubs or more positive discrimination initiatives could force the hand of some club settings. Cunningham (2008) suggests that in order for organisational change to take place there needs to be a competitive (where some groups support change) or reformative (where

all groups express dissatisfaction with the organisation) commitment present. In supporting gender diversity in the workplace, he suggests the need for the presence of change teams, education, top management support and systemic integration. However, while gender equity policy may exist in an institution, it does not mean that it will be fully endorsed by all staff (see Hoerber 2007).

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