**Putting Around the Issue: How Gender Issues are Pushing Women Away from Golf**

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**Abstract**

I identify the reasons why women leave the sport of golf and what can be done to keep women playing golf. I take a look at the issues presented from a variety of perspectives as they have affected women in sports, and specifically, golf. I also identify, through interviews, what complications are currently present, and explore first-hand experiences with gender equality. What is the pushing factor for women playing golf, but more importantly, what circumstances make women choose to no longer play golf?

The greater issues that are investigated include interpersonal, intrapersonal and structural constraints that women face. From the time commitment to the lack of self-confidence, women have struggled with finding where they belong at the golf course. I talked with many women about their experiences on the golf course, gendered experiences while playing, and what can be done to lessen the number of women leaving the sport. The larger connection to the gender issue is discussed in connection to the male fear of feminization and lack of respect for women on and off the golf course.

**Literature Review**

For as long as it has existed, golf has been a man’s sport. They dominate women in the sport from driving distance to accessibility. The three main themes of this literature review are women’s involvement in golf in some way. They are: the gender, race, and class issues in golf; women playing in a male dominated sport; and women’s persistence in golf and what it is lacking. The literature reviewed here can be applied to almost any category, but an effort was made to try and narrow down main topics from each.

**Gender, Race, and Class Issues in Golf**

The sport of golf is prevalent across the globe, trends of gender and class issues are present all over. The opportunity for everyone to have access to the sport is simply not possible. Golf is an expensive and elitist sport in a lot of the world therefore limiting people’s accessibility. For instance, in Mexico City golf is exclusively played at 13 private clubs. This already sets the tone that those who can afford to play are the only ones who can play. The average cost of membership in Mexico City clubs range from US $16,000 to US $35,000. “Over half (53%) of the population lives below the poverty line” (Ceron-Anaya, 2019, p. 505). Caddies fall under this line often times and receive less respect at golf courses. Caddies in Mexico City are treated differently than others due to their class ranking in relation to the members at the clubs.

Networking has a huge connection to golf, where many meetings and events are held on the golf course. “Gender affects networking behaviors and patterns, which influences its effectiveness; thus, women build less effective networks than men” (Gray, Hicks & Rundels, 2020, p. 627). Many women aren’t in the positions to play golf to make these connections, but many are simply not invited. A lot of women feel the pressure to stay back and hold down the fort while men from their workplace attend the outings and events. As said in a quote by Arthur, Del Campo, and Van Buren, “There is no better place in the world to conduct business than on a golf course” (Gray, Hicks & Rundels, 2020, p. 628). That being said, golf is the informal network that women feel the most excluded from while 46% of women say that the exclusion from this networking is a significant barrier for them reaching their career goals (Sylla, 2014).

In the case of Augusta National Golf Club, there are quite a few examples of sexism and racism throughout time. African Americans were barred until 1990 and women were excluded until 2012. Augusta is a private club which allows them to make the rules for how they operate. Sports commentators have described it as, “right of the private association: the innate right of men to hold on to these homosocial institutions to engage in ‘masculine’ activities away from women” (Nylund, 2003, p. 197). Black women are especially silenced in this situation because they are not chosen as tokens. Renee Powell, the second African American on the LPGA tour shared her thoughts on Augusta, saying that the club “primarily benefits middle and upper-class white women.” She continued to say, “the first Augusta female member will be wealthy and will be white” (Nylund, 2003, p. 199). Since then, the first two women to be invited to join Augusta National were South Carolina financier, Darla Moore and former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Rice is a black woman, which was a big step in the right direction for Augusta.

**Women Playing in a Male Dominated Sport**

From the professional tour viewpoint of this topic, it is more visible. Viewers can see that women are broadcasted less, have less sponsorships, smaller purses/winnings, etc. It is visible to most people that women are looked at differently when playing in a male dominated sport such as golf. By allowing media to portray women as inferior in a sport only fuels their fire. “This privileging of men and men’s activities can result in the homologous reproduction of gender roles and institutionalized practices where women are excluded, marginalized and perceived as less important” (Bowes and Kitching, 2019, p. 5). When news media presents women with titles like, “Women aim to beat men at own game in GolfSixes” and “an event where women line up against men” (Bowes and Kitching, 2019, p. 7) it automatically puts men ahead of women’s ability to perform. Calling golf a man’s game shows the historical exclusion of women in the sport.

Women's sexuality and orientation in a male dominated sport is often assumed by many people. In an interview by McGinnis, Gentry & McQuillan, a female golfer named Bonnie claimed that “she did not watch the Ladies’ Professional Golf Association (LPGA) on television because her husband did not… he thinks all female professional golfers are lesbians and therefore did not want to watch them play” (McGinnis, Gentry & McQuillan, 2009, p. 27). The idea that women who play in sports are homosexual is a bold stereotype. Many women of all walks of life play golf and assuming orientation of women only makes them feel more uncomfortable at the golf course and in public.

Tokenism is something that looks at a different demographic of women in golf. “Tokenism is shown through increased performance pressure, heightened visibility, and stereotyping behavior” (McGinnis, McQuillan & Chapple, 2005). Sometimes even women who are good at the sport feel as though they are only included by men because of their ability. Women who are heavily involved in the sport and play well sometimes still feel like a token. Often times they are treated like any other woman, talked down to, expected to not know much about the sport, etc. until they find out they can play well, too. In an interview, Nellie a Division I collegiate golfer explained how men treated her poorly at her job in a pro shop; failing to give her the same respect as her male colleagues. She went on to say, “the guys that I worked with [said] ‘Oh, you shouldn’t talk to her like that… she plays for the university.’ And then… all of the sudden they would be so small. And would kiss my ass… you know that sort of thing” (McGinnis, McQuillan & Chapple, 2005, p. 324). Although sometimes scary and uncomfortable, breaking those barriers with men on the spot can help break the stereotypical ideas of women on the golf course.

**Women’s Persistence in Golf**

Many women are introduced to golf informally through their family, work events or even through mini golf or golf simulators. Golf offers lifelong health and social benefits and connections within the golf community. Women make up 15-20% of the golfing population. “When women take up golf, 54% of recreational players give up the game within five years” (Shapcott & Carr, 2020, p. 275). Women leave the sport for a variety of reasons, but the male dominated culture and family obligations seem to be at the top of the list. What can be done to keep the women that join in the sport?

Coaches mindsets are a major way to impact women's involvement in golf. Having a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset can be very impactful for women. A growth mindset is the mental state of someone that is always looking for ways to improve and grow performance. “Coaches with a growth mindset about others believe that players’ golfing ability is something that can be developed and improved” (Shapcott & Carr, 2020, p. 276). It is critical that coaches use growth mindsets as it links directly to the motivation of recreational golfers to play. In a study by Shapcott and Carr, they found that “coaches’ mindsets about women golfers’ ability and their feedback will influence women players’ long-term motivation to play golf” (Shapcott & Carr, 2020, p.281). Training coaches to have this type of mindset with players will help women feel that their ability in the sport will grow with practice, positive motivation and feedback.

Social closure is something that women face on the golf course. “Social closure is established when a social group, seeking to monopolize its own life chances, organizes itself against competitors who share some positive or negative characteristics” (McGinnis, McQuillan & Chapple, 2005, p.317). When women feel excluded from certain playing times on the golf course or certain golf courses at which to play at, they feel unwelcomed. They get more discouraged with the sport and are more likely to drop out of golf regardless of the ability they may have. Other examples of social closure that makes women feel uncomfortable is the lack of merchandise in the pro shops compared to men or acceptable bathroom facilities and locker rooms for women.

The skewed employment pool in the golf industry may be another push away from the golf course for women. When looking at women in the Professional Golf Association of America (PGA), the largest supplier of club professionals the numbers are alarming. “Less than 4% of the members and apprentices in this program are women. Few women occupy upper management positions, which gives young women few models to observe as examples for their own career opportunities” (McGinnis, McQuillan & Chapple, 2005, p.327). Having some kind of presence of women in the clubhouse, a teaching professional or even pro shop attendants would help ease the stress for women at the golf course and give them someone to go to with questions.

Many women lack the internal confidence in most cases. The self-limiting beliefs are one of the biggest hurdles for women to get over. Wendy Dean explained that it was not that women lacked the ability, they lacked the self-efficacy and confidence in themselves (Dean, 2018). Women need other people to play with to help diminish the pressures they face at the golf course. Many women are in other leisure sports groups such as softball leagues, pickleball, bowling, skiing groups, etc. Women find that having that same group of people they are comfortable with in one sport can transition well to golf. In a study by Wood and Danylchuk, a group of women were looking for another recreational activity to replace their softball league, “they were drawn to golf because they thought it would be an activity that would enable them to spend time with one another while meeting their desired level of physical activity” (Wood & Danylchuk, 2011, p.8). Having a supportive group of women when trying a new sport really improves the overall experience for beginners and continuing on in the sport.

**Implications from the Literature**

The three main themes of the literature reviewed gender, race and class issues playing in a male dominated sport, and time cut short for women in the sport, all play a huge factor in their persistence with golf. The issue of having enough money and social credibility coming from the golf course affects women's ability to play. Women beating the odds and continuing to play in male dominated sports is helping make it less intimidating for women who want to join. Having role models on the golf course and in media is another way that women can start to feel more welcomed at the golf course and grow their self-confidence in their ability to play.

**Argument**

I found through my research that there are three main categories of constraints that issues fall under when it comes to women's participation in golf: interpersonal, intrapersonal and structural. These constraints are what push women away from the sport. The pressures they put on themselves, pressure by other people and pressure by physical limitations are what hold them back. The biggest connection to why women leave the sport is because of the fact that they are playing in a male dominated sport and trying to feel welcome at a place known to be for men.

**Interpersonal constraints**

The first of three main constraints of why women leave golf is interpersonal constraints. Interpersonal constraints are defined as “the result of interpersonal interaction or the relationship between individuals’ characteristics” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p.220). Types of common interpersonal issues and interactions are societal expectations, gender expectations, spousal interaction, teammate/friend interactions, etc. These are very common and can happen in almost any setting. Whether someone is buying groceries at the local market or heading to the first tee on the golf course, interpersonal interactions can happen anywhere. Where we find these interactions, we find constraints that people face.

Societal expectations can be broad, especially on the golf course. There are on-course interactions with golf staff and other players enjoying their round. As frustrating as it is, there are many stereotypes about women on the golf course. For example, one is that they are there to “look pretty” wearing tight clothes and attracting the male eye. Only few are seen to be there for strict competition and appear to be focused on the game. And for many women, they seem lost on the golf course. Women feel that they need to break these stereotypes, which makes every interaction on the golf course important. The basic of tasks, from entering the parking lot, to walking into the pro shop, finding a golf cart, where to put your bags, how to dispense range balls, talking to the starter on the first tee, etc., the interpersonal interactions that women face can be very intimidating.

One of the most common issues women face in golf is finding a partner to play with. It is difficult from the very start with the “estimated ratio between the numbers of male golfers compared with female golfers who actually come out to the course by themselves about 20 to 1” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p. 226). Many women want to use golf as a way to meet people and make new friends. Women often prefer to play with someone they know, preferably other women as this provides a feeling of security on the course (McGinnis, 2005). Being away from children or a significant other for a few hours can be very relaxing to women. Some of the best ways for women to meet people is through playing in leagues, tournaments and work-related events. But what happens when women struggle to feel comfortable in those settings? This can lead to intrapersonal constraints visited later on.

Another deterrent for women at the golf course is the abundant nonverbal communication. Many of these nonverbal cues and on-course can intimidate some women. Male actions that include going to the bathroom on the golf course, cigar smoking, folded arms, hands on hips, faster-paced play behind female groups, being nonresponsive on conversation, etc. signal male dominance (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006). Nonverbal communication can be just as powerful as verbal communication, sometimes more. By doing this, men are sending the signal to women that the golf course is a man’s place.

Another place where gender comes into play is how women learn the game. Of the over 5,700 golf instructors, 76% are men and 19% women (Zippia, 2021). Simply being taught by a male can be intimidating to women and deter them from trying the game or continuing to play. On top of the sheer difference in number of female teachers, male teachers often communicate differently with female golfers. There is a “tendency for male professionals to ‘talk down’ to female patrons and/or demonstrate a lack of interest giving the lesson” (McGinnis & Gentry, 206, p. 228). Women tend to want to take lessons with other women and female teachers so that their needs are met respectfully.

For women, spousal interaction is another common type of conflict on the golf course. Women are sometimes taught how to golf by their fathers or sons, but most commonly it is by their spouse. While this is great to be able to have somebody they trust teaching them the game, not everyone is a professional and a lot of incorrect information can be passed on. Something that tends to happen that really creates conflict is the fact that husbands sometimes feel the need to “dumb down” terminology and technique. This makes women feel like they won’t ever have the capability to understand all of the information if they aren’t able to fully understand terminology. On the flip side, maybe women who are decent at golf and are having a bad day oftentimes get advice from their spouse when they don’t even want it. Many professionals who were asked about this agreed that “female golfers have a tendency to receive unsolicited advice from male golfers, often their spouses or significant others. Unsolicited advice makes women feel ‘stupid’ or talked down to” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p.226). This is something that has been happening for a long time and deserves male attention to the issue.

Lastly, a reason that women are turning away from the sport is the interaction between other golfers on the course-- male and female. The stereotype of women playing slow and chatting is not true with all groups at all golf courses. Men hitting into women to urge them to play faster only makes things worse on the golf course and makes women feel like they aren’t welcome. A surprising factor here is that women also feel uneasy around some women. Especially in competitive situations, women can give off the “bitch factor,” this tends to include things like nitpicking the rules, procedures and unwritten knowledge that oftentimes women learning the sport know nothing about (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006). It is important to remember that similar to men, women are all on the golf course for different reasons. Some are there to compete and some are there to just relax and have fun, and some are there to learn, all should be equally respected.

**Intrapersonal constraints**

The second type of constraints is intrapersonal. Intrapersonal constraints include things such as: personal factors, attitudes, issues that one faces within themselves. As identified by McGinnis and Gentry, the three most prevalent intrapersonal constraints that women face on the golf course are levels of anxiety, self-confidence, and knowledge of the sport (2006). Men can feel this pressure as well but tend to perform better under the circumstances. Women tend to turn away from the sport when these constraints begin to be too much.

Start with anxiety. Anxiety is described as a feeling of impending doom and apprehension, a response to stress or strain, and is the tension one feels when under threat (Becker, 1976). Golf courses can tend to appear less concerned with meeting women’s needs from merchandising, to having nicely cut women's tee boxes. Many factors can play into women's anxiety on the golf course. “Female golfers, as a whole, were said to experience much more anxiety, the result of primarily feeling unimportant, threatened, lost or accepted” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p. 223). As a surprise to many people, the hardest part at the golf course is walking from the parking lot to the first tee (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006). Women who are learning the sport don’t know where to put their clubs, where to pay, know a who a starter is, how to dispense range balls, where to park a golf cart, etc. These can all be very intimidating to someone who is learning and may need to ask for help, especially when most everyone near is male.

Having self-confidence can be a struggle for anyone in an array of settings. For women, finding that confidence in a sea of men at the golf course can be a bit of a struggle, especially for beginners. Women often try lessons to learn the sport, “they are very tentative in the teaching process, but tend to refrain from asking questions” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p. 225). Female golfers tend to set the bar much lower for themselves than male golfers for a few reasons. Women typically will play golf at some point and see the distance disparity between the two balls. Immediately women believe that they will never come close to hitting the ball that far and set the bar too low. This lack of self-confidence isn’t something that is just in the clubhouse, this lasts the entire round. Women need to build their self-esteem and continue to set the bar higher for themselves, because they are fully capable.

Going hand-in-hand with self-confidence is the lack of knowledge/ability. An interview with a head female professional by McGinnis & Gentry explained that, “women tend to have less background in sports, which makes it more difficult for women to learn the game because they have less of an athletic basis for learning” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p. 225). Also revisiting the major issue of receiving unsolicited advice from husbands, directly affects women's knowledge of the sport. Golf requires much more time and practice than many other sports, it is important to not compare oneself with others who are much further along in the process of learning. A reminder to all women should be that golf is a very complex sport, especially if you are learning it later in life. There are lots of rules--written and unwritten--terminology, technique, etiquette, etc., but that does not mean it cannot be learned.

**Structural constraints**

Thirdly, and perhaps the largest type of constraint that issues fall under are structural constraints. Structural constraints are intervening variables between preferences and participation. This includes many things from family life cycle, scheduling conflicts, cost, lack of time, seasonal constraints, knowledge of availability to financial resources, merchandising, teeing grounds, news reporting, etc. (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006). Breaking down these barriers would be essential to keeping women in the sport.

The idea of “ethic of care” describes perfectly what women go through when struggling to continue the sport. As women age, they start families and gain more and more responsibilities. “Patriarchal expectations are such that women are expected to take care of others first before attending to their own needs, the ‘ethic of care.’ This not only affects women's access to leisure but also their sense of entitlement” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p. 221). It becomes normal for men to leave for the majority of the day to play golf but frowned upon for women. With family obligations, comes the issue with time commitment to the sport. Golf requires practice time, as well as a good chunk of someone's day playing an 18-hole round.

Although often overlooked by facilities, merchandising to women is huge at the golf course. Many golf courses cater to men’s needs more than womens. This translates to merchandise as well. Typically, there is a much broader selection of men’s clothing and equipment than women's in pro shops. From shirts, to bags, clubs, etc., the variety and availability is much more suited to men. There is an obvious discrepancy between men’s and women’s clothing…women’s clothing is there for token reasons and just to keep the women happy. “Women’s clothes appear to be tucked in faraway places, out of the way of the highly trafficked spots” (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006, p. 235).

Teeing grounds is one of the most frustrating things for women to face as they progress in golf. Tee boxes were designed for skill level, not gender. The longer someone can hit the ball, the further back they should tee off. Now, “tee boxes are not merely related to skill level, they are also imbued with gender codes, with the most forward tee often referred to as the ‘ladies’ tee’” (Bowes & Kitching, 2019, pg. 4). Sadly, the expectation that women tee off from the shortest tees is rooted in tradition, making it difficult to get better at the sport. Men typically do not play from the forward tees unless they are older because of the stigma that they are “ladies’ tees.” When really, they are for beginners, people who can’t drive the ball very far but have a good short game, youth golfers, senior golfers, etc. Tee boxes are based off of distance, not gender, but are mistaken as such.

Lastly, something that is a constant pressure on women is simply the media and how they present women in the sport. The way headlines are worded, and comments made by important people in the golf industry really set women at a disadvantage from the very start. A comment made by English professional golfer, Eddie Pepperell claimed “he would rather miss every cut this year than lose to the women in the weekend’s GolfSixes tournament in St. Albans” (Bowes & Kitching, 2019, p. 9). An article by the *Sunday Telegraph* read, “the women were playing off the forward tees, but this was still an impressive performance” (Bowes & Kitching, 2019, pg. 9). The problem with advertising women in golf is that gender is always the headline. It appears positive at first glance, but actually includes words, expressions or themes that subtly belittle women. Most all sports media pays attention to women’s use of forward tees, thereby downplaying their successful performances” (Bowes & Kitching, 2019, p. 17). It will take a lot of change to be able to break news media of their ways of drawing people in, but currently they are using gender as the pulling factor.

**Interviews**

I wanted to learn the opinions and ideas of women near me and their perceptions of the golf course. I chose to interview women who had varying experience and involvement with golf to get a broader view of the issue. I interviewed eight women who live in Minnesota with ages ranging from 15 to 89. They all had varying levels of involvement with the sport and their experiences at the golf course. I asked 10 questions and asked them to elaborate and give examples when they could. The women I interviewed are as follows:

Kate – Age 15

Danielle – Age 27

Mikayla – Age 29

Kelly – Age 44

Katie – Age 59

K.C. – Age 64

Marge – Age 83

Joan – Age 89

My goal was to listen to their responses, hear their examples and stories, how the golf course makes them feel and then place those into the three categories of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural to see what is most prevalent in those that I interviewed. I also wanted to try and connect the issues that I have found to a broader issue because from many of the women, I felt as though it was definitely a problem larger than just at the golf course.

I first wanted to understand the involvement that each of the women I interviewed had with the sport. I asked their age, occupation, length of time they have played golf, and a brief overview of their involvement with the sport. I wanted to know what made them choose to start the sport and most importantly, what made them decide to stick with it. I asked who they typically played with and if they played in a league or tournaments. Most importantly of the personal questions I asked what prevents them from playing more golf? I switched the questions halfway through to a more gendered approach to find out how these women felt around men at the golf course. I asked what typical interactions they face with male golfers and if there were any issues that they see at their own golf course between male and female golfers. I wanted to know if golf was important to their career and how it had helped their connections within their community. Lastly, I asked if they had any suggestions to help make golf more welcoming for women.

Kate, a 15 year old, who was brought into golf by her dad is now on her high school golf team after many years in junior golf programs. She has played golf “her entire life.” Some of the issues she has faced even at the young age of 15 show the pressures that these girls are faced with early on. She claimed that she tends to get more nervous around male golfers as they tend to be better/older than her making it intimidating at times. She was adamant that golf should not be highlighted as just a “man’s sport” and that women can have great success and have fun playing too. She shed a light on a disadvantage she has faced because she is a successful girl in the sport.

“While playing with some boys from my school, I shot close to or around what they were shooting. Jokingly, they proceeded to tell me that I wouldn’t actually win even if I had beaten their scores because I tee off at the reds and them from the whites. I felt at this moment that I was at a disadvantage solely because of my gender and the rules put in place to have women tee off closer to the green. In this situation I could not win.”

The example that Kate gave about a disadvantage she faced fell into the structural constraint of playing from the red tees, which ultimately became an intrapersonal constraint with her own self-confidence. She plans to continue to play golf throughout the rest of her high school career.

Next was Danielle, who had played golf for over 15 years and now has a job in sales. She played in Division I golf at the University of North Dakota. Because of her natural ability and the length of time she had played the sport, she didn’t feel that there were many issues between her and male golfers. Men tend to act differently when female golfers have natural ability to play. She put a lot of emphasis on how much golf has helped her with connections in her community and her career. When asked what would make golf more welcoming to women she talked about easier access to equipment as golf can be a spendy sport. Time was the biggest reason why Danielle hasn’t been able to play as much golf in her adult career.

Close in age to Danielle, and a teammate of hers’ was, Mikayla. She has played for close to 25 years and was on her high school team making it to state twice individually and twice as a team. She received a golf scholarship to the University of North Dakota and has maintained play in charity events and league back at home. Mikayla is a six-year consecutive women's club champion at her local golf course and has had amazing success in the sport. She explained that she feels like she is more respected at the golf course because she can compete and score well. She is now the head golf coach of Grand Rapids girls’ golf team. She explained that on men’s day, the high school golf teams can’t even practice or play after school because that is reserved for men only. Tuesday, women’s league day, high school teams are able to practice and play. This highlights some interpersonal constraints that women face with men as they are not even welcomed on a certain day of the week.

The next woman that I talked with was, Kelly who has played golf for 33 years and is now the Vice President of Operations for Burggraf’s Ace Hardware. She is a two-time state high school champion and played Division I golf at Wake Forest University. She joined golf because she liked the challenge and had some friends who were interested, too. For Kelly, time is the biggest thing that prevents her from playing more golf. Since her success in college, Kelly has gotten married and started a family. It is hard for her to leave responsibilities at home and play golf for half a day. It is much easier for her husband to take the afternoon to go play with buddies than it is for Kelly. This highlights the “ethic of care” as described earlier in relation to structural constraints. She spoke to how golf has changed her life for the better with her connections in her community. She said, “golf has given me everything I have.”

Next interviewed was Katie, a single, working mom who had played golf off-and-on her whole life. She didn’t know the rules very well as she played mostly for fun with family growing up. She was accused of cheating because she putted her ball out from across the hole which is a rule violation. Not knowing this, men that were playing made her feel embarrassed for not knowing the rules even at such a young age. Because of this, she chose to not compete in high school. When Katie moved to a new town, she got a job at the local golf course in the pro shop to try and meet people. Since she had started to play more in her adult life, she felt that would be a good way to meet some new friends. Cost is an issue for Katie as golf itself is very expensive, the equipment, and the ability to take time off to participate. This falls under a structural constraint.

K.C. was the next golfer I spoke with. She has played golf close to 35 years but was introduced at a very young age. As a kid, her dad put her and her siblings in lessons at the local golf course, but she said that the boys were always catered to more and not much attention was paid to her and her sister during the time. She was frustrated because she kept missing the ball but wanted to get better, and there wasn’t support from the teacher. Once she got married, she was exposed much more to golf as he was a scratch golfer. She furthered her interest by starting the Tuesday night evening league because she wanted to create something for working women. When it was brought up to the professional at the golf course, he said that he didn’t know if he wanted to shut the course down for women for only nine holes and claimed that “no one will want to join that.” To their surprise, they had 54 women sign up! K.C. believes that golf will always be a “man’s sport.” There will always be something that scares women to join, a lot of it has to do with women’s self-confidence and the pressure of being competitive.

Marge is a grandma to nine grandchildren and many great-grandchildren. She worked a few part-time jobs in her life but was mainly a stay-at-home mom to her four children. She joined golf when she moved to a new town and played with a few friends because she thought it was a sport she would enjoy. She started to learn golf at a smaller golf course that was very lowkey where there wasn’t pressure of large amounts of golfers. Once she felt that she had enough experience with golf, she started to play at a larger golf course and ended up building a house on the 15th hole. She said she doesn’t have any issues with male golfers, as long as they are following the rules.

Lastly, I interviewed one of the best golfers I know, Joan. She has won 21 club championships starting in 1950 and with her last in 2006. Her longest stretch of wins was from 1995 to 2006. She was not able to play golf in high school or college because they did not have women's sports at that time. Title IX was not passed until 1972, which prohibited federally funded educational institutions from discriminating against students or employees based on sex (HISTORY). She really enjoys playing in invitationals with friends. Joan was a teacher and did not have any children, so she was not held back by home life during the golf season, she was free to do as she wanted. What prevents Joan the most now is that her age and her body not being able to move the way it used to. She talked a lot about why she feels that women are hesitant to join. She believes that it has a lot to do with the person and their own anxiety and self-confidence to play. Intrapersonal constraints are what she thinks holds women back form trying golf. They think that they aren’t good enough or have no chance at succeeding, which is wrong.

All of these women explained different experiences to me in their successes in golf, and where they struggled. For many women, I found that time and work play a huge factor in why they aren’t able to continue the sport. As women start families, their hobbies tend to fall onto the back burner. Many women feel uncomfortable at the golf course because they think they aren’t good enough, they are basing their abilities off of men and for women, the game is totally different. Allowing for more women in upper management positions will help bridge the gap that golf is a “men’s sport.” Seeing women out there working and teaching are ways to help ladies feel less intimidated and more willing to join the sport.

**Discussion/Conclusion**

So, what can be done to keep women in golf and encourage more women to join? Throughout the investigation of literature and interviews with local female golfers, I found that a majority of the reason’s women leave the sport have to do with their interactions with males on the golf course as well as internal constraints that they face. There are many possible changes that can be made to the golf world to help keep women playing. From rejection of sexism in the sport to developing junior golf programs, there is room for major improvement.

To start off, women need to be treated as equals on and off the golf course. Gender inequality is still prevalent today and is the root cause of many of these issues. When women come to the golf course they need to be treated the same as the men. Maintaining eye contact with women, asking them payment questions versus assuming men will be paying, hand them the cart key, etc. Making women feel like they are a part of the process is key to helping them feel welcome at the golf course. Men and women should be welcomed by staff to take lessons and be encouraged when they are beginners. A big push being made by golf courses is to phase out the term “lady.” Women often feel that this diminishes their talent and sets them up to be less than men. Maintaining the fact that tee boxes are based off of skill level, not gender is important to educate to all players. Many golf courses have changed the color of the red tees to another color, so players are forced to go off yardages and skill level.

Management has a huge influence on the golf course. Professionals that support women golfers and respect them the same as male golfers are essential to the business. Encouraging women to enter the golf profession and put in supports to help female golfers would be very beneficial to the industry. We know that women make up 4% of the PGA program. Encouraging women to enter the golf world would help boost visibility in the sport and give young girls someone to look up to at the golf course. Having women head professionals and teaching professionals is important for beginners and young girls to feel that the golf course is their place, too. For beginners especially, “golf managers and marketers need to find a way to make women feel welcome without making it seem as though they need special equipment” (McGinnis, McQuillan & Chapple, 2005, p. 333). Having a good base of supportive professionals will help women greatly in the sport.

Another common issue for women is once they started families, it is more difficult for them to get out to the course and spend a few hours of time. Having childcare options at the course for moms and working individuals would be very beneficial to helping get them back on the course. Another positive that could come from this is implementing an introduction to golf program with the young kids while their parents are playing. This will create strong, young golfers who are aware of their surroundings all while their parents are enjoying their round.

To elaborate on junior golf programs, starting kids young in the sport is very important. By introducing the game to them at a young age, it allows them to understand the sport and have a good foundation once they can join school sports. The golf swing is a complex idea and starting the process young sets them up for success later on in life. Events such as Drive, Chip & Putt, hosted by the PGA encourage kids to start golf at a young age. Drive, Chip and Putt is a free nationwide junior golf development competition aimed at growing the game by focusing on the three fundamental skills of golf, driving, chipping, and putting (Drive, Chip & Putt, 2022). There are local qualifiers, subregional events, regional events, lastly the national finals held at Augusta National Golf Club during Master’s week. Junior golf programs at local golf courses are a great way to start young kids in the game and help young girls feel comfortable on the golf course from the very beginning.

Lastly, encouraging participation in campaigns that promote women in golf are essential to growing not only popularity in the sport, but also including women in networking that happens on the golf course. A campaign called, #inviteHER, powered by the LPGA Women’s Network is a “movement that seeks to create an enjoyable, welcoming experience for women interested in trying the game or picking it back up” (LPGA, 2022). This gives great advice to women about the golf course, what to expect, rules clarifications, etc. The #PLAY9Golf campaign by the USGA encourages new golfers to play nine holes instead of the traditional 18 for a variety of reasons. Some reasons to PLAY9 are so you can practice your entire game, get the family together, get exercise, save money, get to know a new course, save time, and slowly ease into a pretty difficult game (USGA, 2018). The Executive Women’s Golf Association (EWGA) has nearly 12,000 members and is the largest national women’s amateur golf organization. Their goal most recently is to implement more play and to “grow the player and chapters base to create more opportunities for women golfers in a comfortable environment” (Baxi, 2019). The alliance between the LPGA and the EWGA has grown very strong over the last few years and is a great way for women to be included in networking and advocating for positive change in the sport.

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