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## “I Just Want To Play”: Women, Sexism, and Persistence in Golf

Lee McGinnis, Julia McQuillan, and Constance L. Chapple

### Abstract

Golf does not inherently privilege men or women physically, yet men are much more likely to participate in golf. The authors explore the institutional (e.g., societal level) and interactional barriers to women's golf participation and uncover strategies women use to negotiate playing and persisting in golf. Guided by research on tokenism in occupations, statistical discrimination, and feminist research in the sociology of sport, the authors use 10 interviews with recreational women golfers to explore these issues. Similar to women in predominantly male occupations, the women in this study report heightened visibility and experiences with typecasting on the golf course. In addition, social closure operates in the form of unwelcoming courses; women reported feeling ignored, overlooked, or unimportant on the course. The authors discuss several strategies the women in the sample use to overcome sexism and persist in golf.

**Keywords:** sports, golf, gender, tokenism, statistical discrimination, social closure

Since the implementation of Title IX, more American women are playing sports and exceeding previous expectations of women's athletic possibilities (Messner, 2002). Such advances raise our expectations of the possibility of gender-integrated sports. Why then has golf, ostensibly a sport that accommodates a wide range of abilities, remained a “man's game” (Maas & Hasbrook, 2001), despite the notable efforts made by women professional golfers? We sought to answer this question by interviewing recreational women golfers who have persisted in the sport. We learned about the barriers and constraints that they overcame to persist and the strategies they employed.

The physical barriers to women's integration into traditionally male sports are disappearing; however, profound social and psychological barriers and constraints remain. Inspired by the interviews, and insights from the extensive research tradition on women and the labor market, we suggest that similar to many occupations, people often frame golf as masculine. This framing marks women golfers as different or unexpected (Snyder, 1977). For most people, the term *golfer* immediately brings to mind a man, requiring the phrase “lady

golfer" for women. In addition, the disproportionate number of men compared to women on the course heightens women's visibility and encourages tokenism. Institutional barriers such as an unequal distribution of work and leisure time for women and institutionalized sexism inhibit women's participation in golf much the same way discrimination inhibited women's entrance into male-dominated occupations. We suggest that the framing of golf as masculine and women's experiences with conscious and nonconscious sexism, social closure, and tokenism in golf settings have important ramifications for women's participation and persistence in golf.

Research on women tokens in male-dominated occupations, statistical discrimination, and feminist research in the sociology of sport guide our analysis of the institutional and interactional barriers to women's recreational play in golf. We focus on the social-psychological barriers created by gendered expectations and hegemonic masculinity that frame golf as a masculine sport. Specifically, we focus on the characteristics of the course, the clubhouse, the staff, and other players to understand the dynamics that challenge women's participation. We also focus our analysis on the strategies women employ to overcome sexism in a sport that is not ostensibly (i.e., its physical requirements) designed to privilege male golfers.

Our research addresses two questions: What barriers and constraints to participation do women experience on the course and what strategies do women use to negotiate playing and persisting in golf? We also investigated how the institution of golf is structured to privilege men and whether institutional practices on the course can become "woman friendly." By examining women who stay involved in golf, we gain insight into the strategies women use to overcome institutionalized sexism in an area dominated by men. By making visible the structures and dynamics that privilege men in golf and women's agency to overcome these barriers and constraints, we contribute to ongoing research traditions in the sociology of sport and the sociology of gender.

## Literature Review

### *Sexism in Sport*

Although research addressing the social context of women in golf is limited (see Chambers, 1995, and Crosset, 1995, as notable exceptions), there is more research on women in male-dominated sports (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Bricknell, 1999; Caudwell, 1999; Crawley, 1998), gender inequities in leisure time (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004), and gendered sports coverage (Billings, 2000; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). Despite Title IX, women professional and recreational athletes still experience daunting challenges on and off the playing field, including a sense of extra scrutiny of their abilities and worthiness to play in traditionally so-called

male sports. According to Banet-Weiser (1999), the WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association), as a cultural arena, is clearly about normative femininity, heterosexuality, maternity, and perhaps most important, respectability. Simply being outstanding athletes and having the implicit approval of the National Basketball Association (NBA) was not sufficient for establishing the WNBA; they "had to 'prove' to the fans and their sponsors that they are 'worthy' of the game" (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 3).

In addition, studies of women in male-dominated sports show that women players' heterosexuality is questioned when they compete in male-dominated sports such as basketball (Banet-Weiser, 1999) and soccer (Caudwell, 1999). Similar to Cahn's (1993) work on women golfers, Caudwell (1999) found that many of the women soccer players were aware of the butch lesbian image as a popular notion of women who play football in England. In contrast to concerns about butch lesbianism, Bricknell (1999) found that the norms of competitive sailing made the presumed heterosexuality of the women competitors a barrier to their participation. This is because women wearing clothes with the ship's insignia on it are not presumed to be sailors but instead are presumed to be sexual conquests (Bricknell, 1999). Male-dominated sports are a way to assert heterosexuality for men (Messner et al., 2000). Social psychologists have demonstrated people's need to categorize others before interactions (Langer, 1989) and the power of default assumptions about people in particular categories (Hofstadter, 1985). Although not always conceptualized in this way, the psychological challenge of how to categorize women in so-called men's sports triggers questions about sexuality and may act as a barrier to women's participation.

Other researchers have examined how women's participation in male-dominated sports can be seen as a type of resistance to gender and social class structures or as a means to contest ideological terrain (Broad, 2001; Clarke & Critchener, 1985; Deem, 1999; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Messner, 1988; Shaw, 2001). Golf participation is similar because of its male domination and tendency to privilege men. However, participation in many sports, including golf, still appeals to hegemonic masculinity because women by and large adhere to prescribed gender norms. Shaw's (2001) research on resistance in leisure is based on the assumption that leisure is linked to power relations in society. In her extensive review, she contended that resistance is individual and collective and that research should specify the types of constraints women face. We suggest that research on women and golf should also examine individual and collective levels of discrimination and examine the discrimination that women recreational golfers experience. We do not know if women recreational golfers experience the same sexism and tokenism experienced by women professional golfers (Crosset, 1995). Because golf has an equitable handicap system and differentiated teeing grounds, it should welcome all abilities and players; however, research indicates that implementation does not match the ideal. Maas and Haasbrook (2001) demonstrated that golf, similar to many sports, is framed as a young, male, able-bodied contest.

We build on this tradition of research on gender and sports and the work on women professional golfers by focusing on women leisure golfers who overcome gender-based barriers and constraints to persist in the game. We next discuss the key concepts from the research on women in male-dominated occupations that frame our analyses: tokenism, statistical discrimination, and social closure.

*Research on Tokenism, Statistical Discrimination, and Social Closure*

We combine the feminist literature on the sociology of sport with literature from occupational sex segregation (statistical discrimination and tokenism) to help explain the sexism women experience on the golf course. Feminist theorists have conceptualized institutionalized barriers as practices that require little effort to maintain; they take on a life of their own as they are built into the formal structure of work organizations (Acker, 1990). According to Reskin and Hartmann (1986), institutionalized barriers that maintain sexism need not have their origins in prejudice but can be byproducts of administrative rules and procedures that were established for other reasons (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Institutionalized sexism is often the hallmark of imbalanced sex ratios in occupations, or in our case, sports.

As only 24.2% of all golfers (Lieberman, 2004) are women, the sex ratios of professional and recreational golf are similar to male-dominated occupations. In fact, Kanter (1977) considered occupations that contain 16% to 34% of women to be "tilted" and women in these tilted occupations are often treated as tokens. This issue becomes even more apparent in golf when examining the percentage of women compared with men in the Professional Golfer's Association (PGA) of America, which is the golf industry's largest supplier of club professionals. Less than 4% of the members and apprentices in this program are women (Kinney, 2003).

Although the concept of tokenism is rarely applied outside of research on occupations, tokenism can have profound psychological impacts on minority group members (Kanter, 1977; Yoder, 2001). Because of their status as statistical and structural minorities in male-dominated institutions, women tokens often feel performance pressure, heightened visibility, and that they must either "fly under the radar" or risk typecasting (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995; Kanter, 1977; Yoder, 2001). Kanter (1977) suggested that women tokens often respond to increased pressure by accepting their social isolation, by turning against their own group, or by embracing their token status by adhering to stereotypical typecasting. The danger of tokenism, according to Kanter, is that women are "often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals" (p. 208).

The idea of tokens and sex discrimination in institutions is tied to practices of statistical discrimination (England, 1992; Jencks, 1992). Statistical discrimination involves an individual stereotype that is misapplied to the group. For instance, women often are considered slower golfers than men because on average they

have shorter drives. Although it is probably true that many women have shorter drives than many men, this does not necessarily translate into a slower pace of play because shorter drives can be more accurate. Statistical discrimination occurs when an individual is treated as if he or she possesses the qualities and characteristics typical for his or her sex, regardless of his or her individual abilities. The assumption that a woman will have short drives or slow play is an instance of using stereotypical attributes of a group to predict an individual's performance; this is as true in golf as it is on the job.

As described above, golf is potentially open to all abilities and types of players but, in reality, promotes masculine hegemony with the "citizen golfer" framed as young, male, and able-bodied (Maas & Hasbrook, 2001). Coakley and White (1998) applied a "gender logic" idea in their analysis of American sports. They argued that through participation in sports, people learn and reinforce the so-called commonsense idea that women are "naturally" inferior to men in any activity requiring physical skills and cognitive strategies, even when this logic is fallacious. According to Coakley and White, even those who may not share gender logics that govern institutions must nevertheless respond to them as they organize their lives because they tend to be self-perpetuating. Similar to Ridgeway's (1997) conceptualization of nonconscious discrimination, gender logics are self-perpetuating entities that do not require one's conscious intent to create inequality; however, unless a conscious effort is made to change them, gender logics continue. Attitudes and behaviors that systematically and unnecessarily privilege men in golf and frame "good golfers" as male golfers create an unwelcoming atmosphere of social closure.

According to Weber (1978), "(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" (p. 342). Exclusion is based on some externally identifiable characteristic of a group of competitors, which limits the social and economic opportunities to those possessing the valued characteristic (Weber, 1978). We use the concept of social closure to capture the practices that male players engage in to protect their privilege on the golf courses that simultaneously exclude those who do not live up to the golfer ideal. Social closure (excluding women from times and places, not integrating women into the sport, etc.) makes many women feel unwelcome, undeserving, discouraged, and more likely to drop out of golf, regardless of the intent of the practices.

The concepts of tokenism, statistical discrimination, and social closure are consistent with the idea that gender is a social structure at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels of social life (Risman, 1998).<sup>1</sup> This perspective conceptualizes gender as a social structure that organizes society into different and unequal categories based on sex and as an ideology that promotes inequities between the socially constructed categories of women and men. Gendered practices in golf and experiences with sexism manifest themselves for individual women, in interactions between golfers on the course and in institutionalized exchanges



in the clubhouse between professionals and players. Making gendered social patterns visible is a first step in eliminating gender-based inequality. By uncovering how unnecessary gender considerations are for golf, we hope to promote greater integration in golf, and perhaps other sports.

Golf is one of a few sports and leisure activities currently involved in a gender equity debate. Martha Burk's protest at the 2003 Masters Golf Tournament, because of the host club's gender discrimination practices, as well as participation by women in the PGA Tour events, has elevated golf to new levels of gender-based critical analysis (Shipnuck, 2004). Because of this historical moment, identifying conscious and nonconscious gender-based discrimination in golf and offering ways to eliminate or circumvent sexist practices contributes to research on sexism in general and may help those seeking change in golf, in particular. Similar to McGinnis, Chun, and McQuillan (2003), we argue that marketers and managers are in better positions to push for structural gender change than individual players alone. We acknowledge that the recent attempts made by women touring professionals and amateurs to participate in professional men's events can help change perceptions. However, in terms of changing female participation for the long run, marketers and managers are in better positions to enhance the experience on the local level. In addition, we offer evidence that the golf industry will also benefit by fostering greater gender equity and integration in golf. Therefore, after we describe the sample, methodological approach, and insights from the experiences of women who persevered in golf despite encountering several barriers and constraints, we describe actions that those with power in the golf industry can take to promote increased women's participation in golf.

## Sample And Method

### *Data Collection*

The first author engaged in 10 semistructured personal interviews with women golfers during a 1-year period starting in the spring of 2000 and ending in the spring of 2001. These interviews took place before Annika Sorenstam, Michelle Wie, Martha Burk, and other newsmakers in golf penetrated the national media; therefore, the data presented here do not reflect these salient events. All of the women lived in the Midwest at the time of the study, which is where the primary researcher resided at the time of the study as well. Snowball (referrals from each interview respondent) and purposive (sampling women with particular experiences; e.g., recreational but persistent golfers) sampling strategies were used to find participants with a range of experience and ability in golf. Because the interview was long and the goal was depth of experience (not generalizability), we sought participants willing to talk openly and at length about their experiences. Our purpose was to find participants who could accurately and meaning-

fully describe the lived experience on the golf course. A referral from a friend was a good way to establish trust for this process; however, because personal referrals were used in the selection process, participants tended to be in similar professions, as informants would often select those in their workplace as potential participants. Consequently, several informants were selected from the medical profession. Medical professionals were also likely candidates because of the fact that salaries and leisure time inherent in these professions are commensurate with the time and money needed for golf.

The midwestern city in which the current study was conducted is predominantly White. This fact, subsequently, lessened the likelihood that we would obtain minority participants through the referral process we employed. Although research suggests that race is an obvious factor in dictating golf participation, we wanted the focus of the current study to remain on gender irrespective of race. Therefore, we did not purposively seek participants who were minorities; however, nor would we have intentionally left minority women absent from the current study had they turned up in the selection process. The Whiteness of the sample reflects how golf has been racialized, despite recent efforts to make the sport more racially diverse (see, e.g., Sharp, 2003).

The participants were first asked general questions about how they started playing golf, how often they play, with whom they generally play, and what they like about playing golf. After establishing their general experience with golf, the interviews focused on specific questions about gender, sexism, and golf. Finally, each woman was asked if she had suggestions that would help make golf more welcoming for women. An important goal of the research was to learn how some women continued to play golf when so many other women quit. We used a grounded theory approach to describe, explain, and understand the lived experiences of women golfers (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). When the interviews were concluded, and the data transcribed verbatim, we began the process of open coding (Creswell, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Each of the researchers independently coded the data by hand with jottings and notations identifying the general trends and themes in the data. Because existing data indicated that women leave golf at higher rates than men, we paid particular attention to information that could explain this divergence. Open coding produced several themes: sexism experienced in golf, tokenism, statistical discrimination, driving distance, social closure, and persistence strategies. After we identified these broad themes, we began focused coding (grouping similar observations together) to generate our analytic categories. From this focused coding we obtained the detailed information used in our analysis to untangle the institutional and interactional barriers women face when golfing, how they negotiate gender while golfing, and how they persist despite these barriers.

All of the names of the women in this article are pseudonyms, and each participant was assured confidentiality in the research process. When quotes include references to specific locations or people, we replaced them with a generic term or



an X. Because no new information emerged from the last interviews and convergence developed among the major themes, we stopped with 10 interviews. Similar to other qualitative researchers (Gainer, 1995; McCracken, 1988), we found that 10 interviews generated enough data to construct analytic categories and to develop themes.

To address our research questions, we needed women with a wide range of golf experience and ability. Table 1 provides demographic information about each study participant. The women in our sample have played golf for an average of 14.5 years, ranging from 4 to 21 years. All of the women are White and either held professional jobs or were obtaining advanced degrees. Two women play more than 80 rounds per year, two play about 5 rounds per year, and the remainder plays between 10 and 20 rounds per year. They range in age from 25 to 70 years old. Four of the women are married, and eight are employed. Four of the 10 women say that they are serious golfers; the remaining six primarily play for fun.

### Observation and Analysis

Because of the striking parallels between the experiences of women who persist in golf and insights from women employed in male-dominated occupations, we discuss our findings using the concepts described in the literature review: tokenism, statistical discrimination, and social closure. In addition, we found evidence that wider structural inequality influences women's participation in golf. We conclude by offering insights from the study participants about how to make golf more women friendly without deterring men's participation.

#### *Tokenism And Discrimination On The Course: Slow Play And Driving Distance*

Kanter (1977) explained several social-psychological ramifications of tokenism: increased performance pressure, heightened visibility, and stereotyping of behavior. We found that the women in the current study reported feeling all these because of, in part, statistical discrimination. In particular, these feelings of tokenism and discrimination surfaced when the women discussed how they felt they were unfairly labeled as slow or "not good" golfers because of their shorter driving ability. Several participants told stories of others expecting slow play or automatically assuming that women are not good golfers. Because women make up the minority of golfers, many of the women in the current sample, as tokens, felt singled out and highly visible on the golf course. They also felt unfairly stereotyped as not good golfers.

Driving distance and the speed of play are used to frame women as not good golfers. According to the women in our sample, this is how the process of statistical discrimination in golf plays itself out. Other golfers see most women hitting shorter drives than most men and assume that all women are slower players (i.e., not good golfers). However, many players, according to the women in the cur-

**Table 1.** Descriptive Information for the 10 Study Participants

Order Interviewed	Pseudonym	Age Started Golf	Age Now	Number of Years Played	Employment Situation	Relationship Status	Considers Self a Serious Golfer?	Rounds Per Year
1	Susan	24	29	5	Hospital employee	Single	No	6 to 12
2	Fran	14	35	21	Medical sales representative	Married	Yes	80 to 100
3	Mindy	17	33	16	Judge Advocate for Air Force	Single	No	5 to 10
4	Lana	51	55	4	Nurse anesthetist	Married	Yes	150
5	Rose	34	45	11	Nurse	Single	No	15
6	Eileen	8	35	27	Professor	Married	No	20
7	Sheryl	45	64	19	Nurse anesthetist	Married	Yes	60
8	Sharon	18	26	8	Recently earned an MBA	Single	No	5 in 8 yrs
9	Nellie	6	26	20	MBA student	Single	No	10
10	Doris	50	70	20	Television personality	Single	Yes	50

rent sample, do not take into account the placement of men's longer and women's shorter drives. As one participant cogently pointed out, men's errant long drives can end up slowing down play much more than women's shorter but accurate drives.

I may not hit the ball as far as they [men], but I am more accurate than they. ... That ball that they hit a country mile over in the next fairway ... I just sit there and wait for them to go find their ball. I'll get them because they have to use a shot to come back, and I'll get them because I'll go straight down the middle of the fairway, maybe only a 150 yards, but it's straight down the middle of the fairway, and then I'll pitch up and my putting is real good. So I can beat most of the guys. (Doris)

Driving distance is often an easily identifiable and important marker of who deserves to be on the course. Being a new golfer and a female golfer may give women a feeling of heightened visibility and undue performance pressure. This increased performance pressure, a classic by-product of tokenism, is evidenced in several accounts. According to Fran, many of the new golfers she plays with express unjustified dissatisfaction with their play and their image as golfers based on how far they can drive the ball.

You know, actually I do think about it when I am playing with some of my good friends. They tend to comment, "Oh I didn't hit the ball as far as you." But they forget to think that maybe they hit the ball straighter than I did or in a better position on the fairway than I did that makes it easier for their second shot onto the green. But I still think that in many women's minds it is sort of a downfall.

Women also expressed that they wanted to feel "up to par" with the men on the course, which often translated into driving the ball a similar distance.

I don't know about outperform [the people you're playing with] but at least stay up to par. I mean if you are playing in a foursome with well, like I played in a tournament with three men and I was the only female. So I am the only one going up to the female tee box when the rest of the guys are playing from the male tee box, you know, so it is different. And then, they know they have to use two of your drives so you feel the pressure to actually perform well enough that they would feel comfortable using your drive. (Susan)

This might simply be a general competitiveness on the part of some of our participants, or it might, as indicated by the next excerpt, suggest that women have to play similarly to men to feel as if they deserve to be on the course. This feeling is very similar to the performance pressures women expressed in male-dominated occupations (Kanter, 1977; Yoder, 2001). In response to a question about the arrangement of different tees, Nellie said,

That all puts together the reasons why people react to them maybe or men react to them in that way. They get this extra little space, you know, the ladies' tee of course I don't just mean how everybody treats them, but I think also that's maybe how the women get the feeling that they are not seen as full golfers because they

have some other privileges ... or, like strong golfers. You know, like competitive golfers.

However, experiences with tokenism can translate into role distancing in which individual tokens try to distance themselves from their group. Although she values accuracy over distance, Rose loves to “out drive” her friend. More telling for her identity as a golfer, although she does not drive the ball far, she said she does not believe she looks like a “wimp” either.

Oh we can get kinda vicious with each other and I love to beat her [her friend], and I love to out drive her. So yeah, we are competitive. [In response to a question about which is better: distance or a low score] Oh, a low score. I don't hit my golf ball very far. I don't have a lot of distance, but I feel like I hit my balls fairly straight. I wouldn't say I am a complete wimp when I hit my balls, and my short game isn't too bad.

Driving distance was a concern for many of the participants and subtly informed their identities as deserving or good golfers; however, concerns over driving distance were eclipsed by the women's preoccupation with being framed as slow players. Although slow play is common at many golf courses and with many different kinds of players, the women in the current study indicated how they felt “picked on” when it came to this problem. Feeling picked on and unduly singled out is a classic reaction to the heightened visibility and stereotyping tokens often experience. One participant claimed that a starter warned her group (three women and a young boy), before they started on the first hole, to make sure they kept up with the group in front of them. The marshal did this even though he did not talk to any of the groups of men starting the course (according to our informant) and had no idea how fast or slow these women were likely to play. Other participants described similar experiences of being singled out. One participant indicated that women play faster because they are sensitive to how others will react to them:

Men think that women are slow. They really do think that, and when I play with all these guys, I say to them, I'd rather play with women. Women move faster than you guys, and the reason is, is that we don't hit as far, and our balls are usually pretty straight. We know our limitations; we know how far we're going to hit the ball. (Doris)

Doris's view of slow play closely resembled Fran's, who commented how men are just as slow if not slower. “I think men in my experience can be just as slow as a group of women. In my years of playing golf, I have been behind many slow groups, and, honestly, I think more of them have been men.” Eileen indicated, echoing the performance pressures highlighted earlier, that she feels rushed because of the slow play label: “I'm almost overly conscientious of slow play, and sometimes actually rush when I shouldn't because I don't want to be slow.” We argue that her heightened sensibilities to this treatment has made her and many

other informants in the current study acutely aware of the time discrepancies between men and women, arguably making her and other women golfers' accounts more credible.

Women's feelings of frustration and stereotyping did not stem solely from the misperceptions of their driving distance or their speed of play. In the following excerpt, Nellie, a former Division I collegiate golfer who worked in a pro shop while in college, explained the poor treatment she received from the other side of the counter. She noted how some men entering the pro shop failed to respect her golf knowledge until they were notified of her collegiate golf background. In the following statement, she explained how the interactions often changed when the men found out she was a university golfer.

The men who would come in were very ignorant. ... They sort of treated me like, "Oh, you're a woman. You don't even know what golf is." I would say something about buying a ball, and I would say what kind of ball ... but they didn't know what I was asking. So it was like, "What do you mean?" You know, they kind of pretended that I didn't know, and then those 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 the thing.

Finally, several women, in reaction to the tokenism they experienced on the golf course, displayed what Kanter (1977) called "role entrapment" in which tokens embrace stereotypical roles. For some of the women in our sample, role entrapment translated into emphasizing the femininity of golf and exaggerating differences between men and women on the golf course. Some of our participants' continued interest in golf was premised on framing golf as a feminine pursuit, in line with their overall feminine identity. For the women for whom maintaining a feminine identity was critical, it was important to them to play golf in such a way as to not appear too masculine—or not too aggressive, physical, or dominating. When Fran was asked whether a woman's femininity was at risk in playing golf as it might be with such sports as football, she responded,

No, actually I think that golfing for a woman would actually go the opposite direction. I guess I have never been asked that question. I have never thought of it in that way. Golf can be a very graceful game to watch for both men and women. If anything it is almost more of a woman's sport, if you will, than I would think of it as a male sport. ... I think there are certain sports that sort of isolate themselves from the male/female thought, so I would have to say that golf is probably one of them.

For Fran, golf is consistent with femininity; she was perplexed that others do not see this. A different example of role entrapment entailed women downplaying their own successes to protect male golf partner's threatened masculinity. When women downplay their successes at golf or refuse to compete directly with men, we argue that it can maintain hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Ac-

according to the rules at many courses, people should select tees according to ability; however, according to some of our informants, the unwritten, gendered rules regarding “men’s tees” and “women’s tees” usually prevail. For example, Doris, when asked if the men she plays with ever played from the forward tees, replied,

Very few men do because there’s a stigma attached [to] that. I think the only ones who will are the older men. But no, it’s rare, and the thing is, I can beat a lot of average golfers, men golfers. But then, rather than really embarrassing them, they’ll say, “Ooh, that was a good shot,” and I’ll say, “Well, I had an advantage, I was using the forward tees.”

Doris, an avid golfer, knows very well that there are front and back tee boxes that are to be used based on experience and driving distance, not on gender. At the same time, she bolsters her companions’ masculinity by downplaying her ability and attributing her success to the advantage of the forward tee.

The women interviewed clearly exhibited many of the same coping strategies expressed by female tokens in male-dominated occupations. The token women golfers reported feelings of frustration because of stereotyping, heightened performance pressures due to increased visibility, and role entrapment because of gendered expectations of behavior. Similar to the difficulties in persisting in male-dominated occupations, tokens on the golf course may have trouble persisting at golf. This is especially true if their experiences with tokenism are coupled with social closure.

#### *Social Closure: Course Setup, Merchandising, Role Models, and Golf Functions*

Women often spoke of female friendly golf courses and golf outings. We believe what the women are describing when talking about female friendly experiences is inclusive golf; when women describe situations that were not female friendly, they were experiencing social closure. Social closure occurred in several domains: course setup, merchandising, role models, and golf functions. Each of these categories overlaps to form a potentially unwelcoming atmosphere to women on the golf course, signaling to women that they are not serious, deserving golfers.

Course setup was one of the first and most frequently mentioned unwelcoming issues. Some of the women indicated that restroom facilities for women were insufficient. One woman described the possible source of limited facilities: men used the outdoors. In response to a question asking if there is “anything men might do to send signals that women are outsiders,” Sheryl, who plays more than 50 rounds a year, responded: “I don’t think so, except not using the bathroom. Men don’t do that very often; they just go behind a tree.” This action conveys a message to women that men are not concerned with their presence, thereby defining golf courses as men’s spaces. We doubt that this is a common practice; however, the mere fact that it happens sends a message to women. These acts signal social closure because the golf course is essentially an extension of the male-only



locker room: a so-called backstage area in which the self-restraint expected in public domains does not apply.

The limited availability of women's golf clothing and equipment was a more common complaint in the interviews. Some of the women who described the lack of merchandising pointed out that because fewer women golf than men there is less merchandise available for them. The absence of female-oriented merchandise often signaled a course that was not as Lana termed it, "female friendly." In addition to inventory disproportions, the appearance that women's merchandise is stashed in out-of-the-way places or located in less trafficked areas was discouraging for some of these women as well, even if they recognized the reality of the market. For example, Lana said:

Maybe it's because the percentage of female golfers is lower, so naturally you have to cater more to the men. But at course X, I just had a bad vibe when I looked in there, not even a visor for the ladies. ... Since I have been golfing, I get a lot of golf catalogs, and most have of them have just one page or two pages of female clothing.

Fran made a similar comment:

There are always small sections for women's golf shoes and women's shirts at golf clubs. So you sort of feel like, well, here off in the corner are all the women's things and everything else seems male — all oriented towards the men.

Equipment complaints were similar, with some of the remarks targeted toward the lack of clubs for women. The availability of merchandise is tied to the general male-oriented structure of golf.

Clothes, there is always just a little selection for women and those things and just the way they might be treated on the golf course. Well, they don't hit the ball as strong of course, so they don't get the same kind of respect. It's like they [women] don't know what they're doing. (Nellie)

This final comment from Nellie is particularly telling. Not only is she upset about the lack of merchandise for women, she links this exclusion to the larger dynamics that frame women as not deserving to be on the course. For Nellie, a serious golfer and a former German national golf team member, clothes and merchandise are not just representations of self but rather markers of social acceptance. Even such an accomplished golfer felt unwelcome. The lack of available clothing and merchandise resulted in many women's feeling excluded from the course.

A lack of women role models made several women feel excluded from golf as well. From a sociological perspective, an all-male inner circle signals social closure; from a player perspective, male-dominated courses are not female friendly. The lack of women role models was particularly problematic in pro shops. Eileen, a 35-year-old woman who began playing golf when she was 8 years old, pro-

posed the idea of a female professional or instructor making golf easier or more welcome for women:

I don't know if it would make it easier, but I do think that some women would probably be more inclined or more comfortable, for example, taking lessons from other women. So maybe more women pros at country clubs. ... I think that might help.

Also, the lack of coverage of women's golf on television signaled to some of our participants that women's golf was not taken as seriously as men's golf either at the professional or at the recreational level. Sheryl, a serious player in her 60s, suggested,

Before The Masters on Saturday and Sunday, I don't know if you got a chance to see it, they had a 2-hour segment called the history of golf. ... They had maybe 10 minutes that they talked about women, and they talked about Babe Didrikson. They only talked about four women: Nancy Lopez and a couple of others. But the whole segment was only about 10 minutes long. When you see advertisements on TV, they aren't advertising women's clubs; they aren't advertising balls for women or equipment or anything at all. It is all for the men.

Providing empirical support to Sheryl's observation, Maas and Hasbrook (2001) found that few women are featured in advertisements or articles in golf magazines.

Most of the women we interviewed realized that it is difficult for golf facilities to hire women because of the skewed employment pool. As mentioned previously, the PGA of America, the leading provider of professionals to the golf industry, is approximately 97% men (Kinney, 2003). One explanation for this apparent lopsidedness is that few women occupy upper management positions (i.e., head professionals or directors of golf), which gives young women few models to observe as examples for their own career opportunities. A different explanation is that it takes extreme courage for women to enter golf professionally when there is little gender-specific social support. As Lana noted, "just having a female presence in the clubhouse I think would help."

Social closure was also evident in the participants' comments regarding tournaments and club functions. Despite justifying low numbers of women's tournaments as an issue of supply and demand, the women interviewed also said that the lack of tournaments implies that women are an afterthought. In many cases, the participants said that the tournaments available to women were often mixed events (i.e., couples tournaments) or so-called socializers with less emphasis on competitive play. These participants indicated that serious play was left for the men. The latent demand for serious play does exist, however, as demonstrated by the four seriously competitive golfers in our sample. Doris stated,

In my case, I don't care. I am out there to play. I don't care who I play with. It winds up that 99, 100% of the time they are men. I don't care what they think. That doesn't bother me.

The women in the current study recognized the gender challenges of many golf courses at which they experienced tokenism and social closure but continued to play in spite of these conditions. We turn now to the strategies women employ to persist in golf in the face of many challenges.

### *Negotiating Sexism on and off the Course: Persistence Strategies*

One of our earlier questions concerned how women continue to play golf despite the challenges that we described in the previous sections. We observed several persistence strategies women use to stay involved. Some of these strategies include playing with same-sex golf partners, playing on woman-friendly courses, limiting participation to off times, and fitting golf in with paid work and child care responsibilities.

*Limiting play to woman friendly places, players, and times.* The women interviewed indicated only a few instances where they could participate in a "pick-up" game (where one goes to the golf course individually expecting to be placed in an unplanned group) or play by themselves. Women often prefer to play with someone they know, preferably other women (McGinnis, 2002). For many women in the current sample, the social support they received while playing is critical to their continued involvement in golf. Playing with other women provides a feeling of security on the course, typical of groups who are in disadvantaged social locations. Difficulty in finding another woman to play with severely limited when and how often many of our participants could play. Some indicated instances in which they would forgo or postpone the idea of playing until they could find their desired partner. One participant said that she prefers to play with other women because it is more comfortable.

I will play with men in a scramble if they need me. ... I'll do that when the pressure is on, but it is more relaxing with the women, and they are professional women—I have to be honest with you. "They," are other attorneys, or finance people. They are professional women. I try to encourage women to pick up the game because it is, if you are a professional, an important game to have. It is an important game at least to be able to play in certain circumstances and to not look like a fool. The worst thing is to play and hack it; that's horrible. In that case, you should probably drive the beer cart or something and not mess around with that. (Mindy)

Mindy indicated a number of important points in this quote. In addition to describing a desire to play with other women, she echoed our participants' general need to feel worthy while on the course. She also highlighted the social and professional importance of golf and the simultaneous danger of incompe-

tence. We contend that the desire to feel up to par affects male golfers as well; few men, however, confront the other subtle messages about driving distance and speed of play that challenge women's golf worthiness. The women we interviewed persisted in golf despite these challenges. The current study participants created a more welcoming atmosphere by finding other women to play with.

Nellie said that although she prefers to play alone, she can understand why other women prefer to play in same-sex groups.

I am sure that they feel together stronger. You can picture like three women out on the golf course, the marshal comes out to check on them, and he will drive off and they will laugh together about it. He had to check up on us women again, you know, that kind of thing. They wouldn't be so intimidated if they were together and they can share together their frustration about being not respected. That cannot bother them so much.

Another persistence strategy that some of the women mentioned was to play when friendlier conditions prevailed. The women indicated a number of different elements that helped make golf what they call female friendly or woman friendly. These elements follow the course layout (fewer par fives or long holes), the availability of women's merchandise in the pro shop, and the general female-friendly attitude toward women by the course workers (talking to the women directly, maintaining eye contact, not hurrying them up, making women feel welcome). According to Sheryl, woman-friendly courses were more welcoming to women and treated women with respect. For Lana, female friendly translated into how she was treated in the pro shop and on the course. For many of the women, defining *woman* or *female friendly* courses and conditions was difficult. They could more easily define situations that definitely were not female friendly, such as when they felt excluded, rushed, and had their golfing ability prejudged. All of the women interviewed challenged the logic of the sexism that they encountered. Some thought carefully about the treatment they received and found it illogical or unfair because it was based simply on their gender and not their ability. Most of the women had trouble articulating their discomfort with sexism in golf; however, all of the women challenged the idea that women are less entitled to play than men. All of the women at some point implied that maybe they were unlike other women because the ideas about women golfers that they encountered did not fit their notions of themselves. This seems to be the only way that they could make sense of the negative attributions they encounter about women golfers.

*"Fitting golf in": Child care, paid work, and golf.* For many of the women in our sample, whether they were single or married, had children or did not, "fitting golf in" between work, family life, and household responsibilities was a major challenge. However, gendered disparities in leisure time were particularly felt by the women in our sample who had children. The unequal division of house-

hold labor in many two-earner marriages is well documented (see, e.g., Coltrane, 2000). Hochschild (1989) called this a stalled revolution because men did not match middle-class women's dramatic increase in the paid workforce with an equally dramatic increase in family work. This broad structural context shapes women's access to time for golf; therefore, some women wait until their children are old enough to require less care to make time for golf. The same is not true for most married men, even those with very young children (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000). Some study participants described how they had more time to play golf when their children moved out of their home. Their experience reflects the gendered expectations that women should devote all of their time to family care, even if this requires a "double day" of paid and family work (Firestone & Shelton, 1994).

Eileen, a college professor, described a double day. She explained how her, but not her husband's, time for golf disappeared when she had kids. When asked if she ever had difficulty playing in pickup games, she responded that she did not "pick up" games at this stage of her life. When asked if she ever went to the course by herself, she laughed and responded,

No, because I normally go with my husband, especially at this stage in the game with the small children. We have to get a babysitter to go or get the other one to stay home. I can't say that I have ever said to my husband, "Will you stay home with the kids so I can go and play golf?"

When we asked Eileen if the situation had ever been reversed, with her staying home with the kids while he golfed, she replied, "Yes, actually it has. Yes, now that you say that, it actually has. But he usually doesn't go by himself. He quite often is going with a friend. I don't really have any girlfriends that play golf." In a different part of the interview she casually mentioned that her husband sometimes left early for work and played nine holes of golf on the way; it never occurred to her to do the same thing.

Several women mentioned that they had difficulty finding time to play golf; it was simply a low priority. This can be considered a strategy for long-term involvement in golf. They make golf a less central part of their lives in the short term so that it can become a key part of their self-image in the long run. Self-image is central to establishing enduring involvement, which is an important construct used by marketers, consumer researchers, and leisure science researchers (Higie & Feick, 1989; McIntyre, 1989; Richins & Block, 1986). Some of the women acknowledged the relegation of golf to the background of their lives but did not seem resentful toward men. In some cases, negotiating golf time was achieved in a very matter-of-fact manner, where the burden of taking care of the children appeared to be no burden at all. Still others were very clear about the challenges of arranging golf time for mothers:

Oh, it's hard with working women with children to get a bunch of women to play, any women, to play golf with you. ... Your schedule is so erratic being a single mom. ... It's really hard because we're working women and mothers with young kids to get to play, to get your schedule worked around so you can play golf with one woman much less two or three. It's very difficult. (Rose)

As mentioned earlier, adherence to gendered norms regarding child rearing limited the time women had to play golf. Several of the older participants described a more serious interest in golf in just recent years after domestic duties lessened.

The women described individual and interactional activities that helped them continue playing golf; however, these strategies did little to challenge institutionalized structural inequality (Risman, 1998). Hearing women describe how they sought out female-friendly courses and conditions helps illuminate how most courses are not routinely woman friendly. Although they probably would not use these terms, we saw evidence of tokenism and social closure operating to make women feel less welcome on the course. Similarly, some women's greater difficulty in finding time to golf and the strategies they employed to fit golf in represent a structural reality of less leisure time for women than men.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Although women continue to take up the game of golf in great numbers, they leave almost as quickly as they enter. The purpose of the current study was to examine the barriers and constraints women face in golf by examining data from interviews with those who stay and play the game. We were interested in the persistence strategies women employed to resist the individual, interactional, and institutional discrimination they encountered. Several interesting and revealing themes emerged from our data: tokenism, discrimination, and social closure; we discuss each in turn.

As suggested by Kanter (1977), tokens can accept their isolation, turn against their own group, or adhere to stereotypical typecasting. Each of these actions was evident to some extent in the current analysis. The most prevalent action was adhering to stereotypical typecasting, as many women seemed to indicate a sense of not wanting to rock the (gender) boat. Rather than creating an unapologetic "in your face" attitude toward sexism (Broad, 2001), the women in the current study were more likely to express unwillingness to golf alone. Golfing with other women provided a way to golf and have no worries about their femininity. For women golfers, playing alone or with men made gender more salient. As indicated by Kanter (1977), the danger in tokenism is that women are often treated as representations of their category. The women in the current study were subject to this danger as noted by the treatment they received from course personnel and male golfers in regard to their hitting distance, perceived slow play, and teeing preferences.



There are several institutional and interactional barriers to women's participation in golf. Social closure and statistical discrimination occur in golf, either consciously or unconsciously, and shape women's perceptions of the game. These gendered interactional dynamics shape women's sense of golf worthiness (i.e., good golfers) and their perception of golf as female friendly. Repeatedly encountering golf courses that are not women friendly diminishes women's desire to play golf. Experiences of social closure and statistical discrimination are serious barriers to women's persistence in golf. Similar to how gender-linked attributes are used to discriminate in employment, the presumption that gender determines driving distance and speed of play subtly contribute to the presumption that only men deserve to be on the golf course. This theme was consistent in the interviews. We recognize that a minimum driving distance is necessary to enjoy golf. Distance, however, is only one component of good golfing; accuracy is as, if not more, important. Long but inaccurate drives can incur extra time and penalties through lost balls and extra shots, contributing to more time and higher scores than shorter but more accurate drives. Some of the women in our sample clearly understood this dynamic; however, many did not. For those who did not, their short driving ability meant that they were not good golfers and, therefore, less worthy of being on the course than long-driving but often inaccurate men.

Gender as structure is evident in the individual-level cognitions and interactional-level activities that inhibited women's participation in golf. Less directly observable but often implied are the broader inequalities that structure all social interactions. The consequences are evident in how golf personnel treated women as afterthoughts or as appendages to their husbands or boyfriends. Many women experienced statistical discrimination when they were singled out for slow play, even though they themselves felt they were keeping up with or exceeding the pace of play. These interactions are frustrating and can be ultimately discouraging for women who already feel that they are playing a man's game. Social closure dynamics made women feel like anomalies and unworthy of being on the course.

In addition to these barriers to women's involvement, we learned of several strategies that help women stay involved. Finding women friendly courses, playing with other women, challenging the stereotypes of women golfers (that women can be competent, competitive players), and focusing on the benefits of golf (e.g., physical activity, beautiful surroundings, and fun competition) helped our participants stay involved. Yet, when individuals alone find ways to accommodate gendered inequity, the system remains unchanged (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Are there systematic changes at the interactional and institutional levels that golf marketers and golf managers can do to make more golf courses and golf as a whole more inviting for women?

We think there are. We see these changes not only as a way to promote gender equality but also as profitable and good for the growth of the game, an initiative often purported by the industry's governing bodies. More women want to play golf than are currently doing so. For the past 3 years the total number of

rounds played has declined (Graves, 2003); however, the demand for golf persists. In the United States, 45 million people call themselves golfers (Graves, 2003); according to the National Golf Foundation (1999), approximately 41 million Americans (older than age 12) want to play golf or play more golf. This 41 million consists of four segments: (a) 14 million current players who want to play more, (b) 12 million former golfers who want to play again, (c) 7 million nongolfers who are interested in trying the game, and (d) 8 million juniors between ages 5 and 17 years who would like to learn or to play more. Of the nongolfers, 60% are women, compared to 20% who currently make up the entire golf population (National Golf Foundation, 1999). Golf associations and managers are already trying to reduce gender inequity in golf. For example, many golf courses have eliminated gendered teeing grounds altogether and are instead using markers such as front, middle, and back for teeing grounds. Some courses are using handicaps as teeing designations.

There is still room for improvement. For example, although some may chalk up the absence of merchandising for women as trivial, this was an important theme in the interviews. Merchandise for women signaled a woman-friendly course that appreciates women golfers. Unlike one participant, we are not convinced that women need special equipment or lessons to accommodate their bodies. Golf managers and marketers need to find a way to make women feel welcome without making it seem as though they need special equipment. In addition, many women described exclusionary nonverbal communication with golf personnel. For example, personnel would not address them or look at them directly but instead turned their attention to the men in their group. Training managers and course workers to treat all women as active and serious golfers will easily remedy this barrier.

An obvious concern for the current study, as discussed previously, is the Whiteness of the sample and the danger that race becomes less evident when only members of the privileged group are examined. Golf has historically been dominated by White wealthy men. The demographics of golf are changing as several golf organizations have made concerted efforts to recruit more poor and/or minority players to golf. On the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) Tour, for example, Korean women are gaining prominence, making increased participation by Asian girls more likely. Shin and Nam (2004) credit this movement to golf's increasing popularity and prestige and the changing of traditional gender roles in Korea.

An important next step in this research stream is to examine how the intersecting axes of inequality (race, class, and gender) shape access to golf (Collins, 1990). For now we emphasize that the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in our sample, and the fact that only one study participant discussed race, highlight how privilege becomes invisible to those who have it, even among those disadvantaged in other respects (White women). Our findings regarding tokenism and gender are perhaps even more salient among minority golfers. It is our belief that although the focus of our research was on sexism experienced on the course, our

findings could and should be extended to the effect of tokenism and race on the course. This remains an important line of inquiry, and we have suggested several adaptations tokens employ to persist on the course. Our findings do little to challenge the hegemony of Whiteness on most golf courses; however, this research highlights several potential areas of overlap between gender and racial discrimination within golf.

Research on eliminating discrimination in male-dominated work places can also contribute to our thinking about ways to end gender-based discrimination in golf. Suggestions for changing workplaces include holding managers accountable, creating interdependence among employees, and neutralizing the cognitive processing that promotes categorization and differential value (Bielby, 2000; Reskin, 2000). It is likely that these strategies will work in golf as well. To these we add suggestions for making golf more inviting to women by having more women working at golf courses, providing more merchandise geared toward women, training employees to not assume that women will engage in slower play, emphasizing that teeing grounds are tied to ability not gender, emphasizing nine-hole play for economy of time, and providing affordable drop-in care close to the golf course for dependents.

Golf is an engaging context in which to observe gender dynamics. Barriers to women's participation in golf constantly emerge despite golf's apparent gender neutrality. Even though the number of women participating in golf has increased, its proportions have remained relatively constant. Although societal-level changes are necessary to make dramatic changes in women's sports participation, the microlevel adjustments we describe begin the process of greater gender integration in golf. Golf has the potential to operate as a so-called gateway sport leading to more gender equity in all sports. Many women "just want to play"; recognizing and reducing gendered barriers to their participation is a step in making that happen.

#### *Note*

1. Gender is the primary focus of this article; however, gender is not the only stratifying system relevant for golf. Race and class also inhibit participation. Because all of the women available to interview were White and middle class and the interview questions focused on gender, only one participant mentioned race or class. This does not mean, however, that race is unimportant but instead highlights the hegemony of Whiteness within golf, even among women golfers.

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