

## **Don't They Know It's Different for Girls?: Young Female Golfers' Experiences Within Junior Club Membership**

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**Abstract Topic:** Instruction and Coaching

### **Purpose:**

There is a plethora of work at elite level within the sports literature, but little upon golf and even less upon the grassroots experiences of young female golfers in the UK (Mitchell et al, 2016). In response to declining participation, efforts have been made to modernise the game and improve perception, yet many stories continue to portray a scenario of bourgeois and hegemonic masculine behaviour (as highlighted in Kitching, 2017). Utilising the works and theory of Bourdieu, this study aimed to fill that gap in the literature. Bourdieu's relational structures of habitus, field and capital were combined with the feminist and gender literature to allow the researcher to explore through interviews the experiences of females as junior golf club members.

### **Methods:**

Coming from an interpretivist paradigm, individual semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experiences of a group of female golfers (n=6) in order to enter the world of the participants and interpret experiences through their eyes. The sample was a convenience sample aged 18-20 years, all of whom were active members of a golf club. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data, and the interview transcripts were explored inductively to all central themes to emerge from the quotes and responses.

### **Results:**

The study illustrated many commonalities to previous research. In particular, strong agreement with Zevenbergen et al (2002) and their study on junior golfers. They highlighted that through rules, regulations and reinforcement of hegemonic cultural gender beliefs, golf clubs are still structured in ways that legitimise the habitus of the dominant social and cultural groups. In addition, four key themes emerged. Firstly, young female golfers face limited opportunities to integrate within the field of golf club membership and build personal capital and social networks that are vital for continued engagement. Secondly, 'a sense of belonging' can provide a measure of resilience for young female golfers to deal with inevitable struggles within their negotiation. Thirdly, traditional golf club practices, (such as insisting girls play from forward tees), simply reinforced hegemonic cultural beliefs that women are less able than men

and that such rules and regulations may have a detrimental effect on the young female golfer. Finally, it highlighted the power of the media to influence culture, reinforce stereotypical behaviour and apply pressure to both girls and boys to conform to gender norms.

### **Discussion :**

Similar to Williams et al (2013) and the review by Kitching (2017), all participants entered a field where there were very few, if any, girls. All spoke of limited opportunities to develop early social interactions and engage with others that could legitimise their position within the club. They either had to play with the boys or look to their family for support. Four of the girls experienced conflict with other sections of the club yet when brought to the attention of club officials, rules were changed to suit the dominant groups, marginalising the younger players. For these players their only option was to find another club in the hope that they would be accepted as a valued member. If this occurred, the girls spoke of a 'sense of belonging' as they were able to develop their social networks, build individual capital and ultimately status within their golf club (c.f. Williams et al, 2013).

### **Practical Application/ Clinical Relevance:**

Although many initiatives are in place to increase participation at National, regional and club level, membership numbers in the UK continue to fall. It would therefore seem prudent to consult young female golfers that have recently experienced junior golf club membership, to gain valuable insights and experiences at a grassroots level. It is hoped that experiences interpreted and presented within this study will form a foundation for further study that can assist NGB's and golf clubs to review their current practices. Clearly NGB's can only do so much; they can create initiatives to grow the game but ultimately golf clubs have to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide an environment that is appropriate for new junior female golfers.

### **References:**

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