



Magazine Article

Women May be the Key to Significant Growth in the Golf Industry

There is a paradox in the golf industry that at once shows an industry that is stagnate or in decline, and at the same time has ignored an untapped market segment that could reverse the decline and generate extraordinary growth and prosperity for the golf industry for many years to come. That market segment is women golfers. Why has the golf industry ignored the potential of this market? The answer may be found in a look at the history of golf, its male dominated culture and the impact that this culture has had on women and their desire to play golf.

It is true that change is often hard to achieve, especially when the culture in need of change has been the norm since the beginning of time. Indeed the history of today's golf with its origin in Scotland in 1457 has been marked by a long and dogmatic discrimination against women playing golf. Men became so obsessed with the game of golf that the game was outlawed by King James II of Scotland, as it detracted from the training for the military.¹ However, the opportunity for women to experience the game and become similarly obsessed was generally denied women with the exception of the woman believed to be the first to play the game, Mary Queen of Scots.

The first woman to play golf, so history reports was Mary Queen of Scots who played her first round in 1568 at the Musselburg Golf Club in Scotland. She quickly made a major addition to the game by establishing the idea of caddies on the golf course when she had French military cadets, or “caddies,” who assisted her when she played.²



Mary Queen of Scots is ready to hit her golf ball.¹

¹ Athletic Scholarships.net, “The Roots and History of Golf - The Origins of the Game of Kings”, <https://www.athleticscholarships.net/history-of-golf.htm>

² Lennox, Doug, Now You Know - Golf, Google Books, “Mary Queen of Scots”, <https://www.google.com/search?q=first+woman+to+play+golf&ie=&oe=>

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During her reign the Queen traveled to France to play golf which led to criticism for playing golf and not spending enough time on Royal matters. She was subsequently beheaded in 1587 at Fotheringhay Castle in England for reasons unrelated to her invasion of the man's sport of golf but for her complicity in a plot to murder Queen Elizabeth. It was during the Queen's reign that the St. Andrews Golf Course was built.³

For the next 300 years men played St. Andrews but women were denied access relegated to remain at home doing the things women in those days were allowed to do. There were very few recreations open to women at this time; croquet, battledore and archery were some of their pastimes. Many of these young ladies' fathers and brothers were members of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club who came to spend the summer in St Andrews.

To provide activity for these ladies who were barred from playing golf, it was decided that a piece of ground be found where the ladies could play without the public gaze and away from the caddies. A nine hole course was laid out to keep the ladies busy while the men played golf. The course was a "miniature links", designed by Old Tom Morris requiring a cleek and a putter and with this addition the St Andrews Ladies' Golf Club was formed in 1867.⁴



Lady putting at St Andrews 1886



Women putting at the St Andrews Ladies' Golf Clubⁱⁱ

At the end of the 19th men continued to work to keep ladies off of the golf course. Lord Moncrieff decreed that women should not hit the ball any further than 60-70 yards. "Not because we doubt a lady's power to make a longer drive but because that cannot well be done without raising the club above the shoulder." He was concerned about the women's need to be discreet. To justify his decree he stated

³ Berkley Golf Consulting , "Learn The History of Women's Golf" <http://nancyberkley.com/774892.html>

⁴ St Andrews Ladies' Putting Club, "Club History", <http://www.standrewsputtingclub.com/history/>

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“Now we do not presume to dictate but we must observe that the posture and gestures requisite for a full swing are not particularly graceful when the player is clad in female dress.”⁵

In 1893, in response to a request for advice from Miss Blanche Martin regarding the startup of the Ladies Golf Union., a leading amateur by name of Horace Hutchinson responded:

“Dear Miss Martin,

I have read your letter about the proposed Ladies’ Golf Union with much interest. Let me give you the famous advice of Mr Punch (since you honour me by asking for my opinion). DON’T.

Women never have and never can unite to push any scheme to success. They are bound to fall out and quarrel on the smallest or no provocation; they are built that way!

They will never go through one Ladies’ Championship with credit. Tears will bedew, if wigs do not bestrew the green. Constitutionally and physically women are unfitted for golf.

They will never last through two rounds of a long course in a day. Nor can they ever hope to defy the wind and weather encountered on our best links even in spring and summer. Temperamentally, the strain will be too great for them.”⁶

The ongoing discrimination and prejudice against women playing golf is characterized by the word 'golf' alleged to be an acronym formed from “gentlemen only; ladies forbidden”. Historians agree that that it's likely that the myth of "gentlemen only, ladies forbidden" as the origin of the word golf arose as a joke made by golfers during earlier times, in the late 19th century or early 20th century.⁷ While it is unknown the exact source of this expression, it clearly underscores the attitude of many male golfers and golf clubs toward women at that time.

With the arrival of golf in the United States the emerging golf clubs continued the “Gentleman Only” culture by banning women from membership and playing golf. The exception was the Shinnaeck Hills Golf Club on Long Island which was the 1st to open its membership to women in 1891. It is noteworthy that golf for women proved so popular that the club opened a 9-hole course for women two years later.⁸ The first ladies golf tournament in the U.S. was held 3 years later in 1894 on the 7-hole Morristown, N.J., course – which later becomes Morris County Golf Club.

Discrimination against women in golf continued into the 1900s with men still asserting that women did not have the physical and mental qualities required to play the game. Male golfers would say “Women talk too much, they play too slowly, they can barely hit the ball out of their own shadows. And when one wins a mixed event... Well of course she did—just look at her high handicap! And anyway she was playing from the ladies’ tees.”⁹

⁵ Women’s Golf Journal, Mair, Lewine, “Gentlemen Only, Ladies Forbidden – a history”, <https://womensgolfjournal.com/golf/no-women-allowed/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ThoughtCo., Kelly, Brent, “Is Golf an Acronym for Gentleman Only Ladies Forbidden? March 30, 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/origins-of-the-word-golf-1561083>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid

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The claim by male golfers that women could not compete with men was put to rest forever by an event that took place in England July 15, 1951.

Leonard Crawley, a golf writer and former British Walker Cup team member was skeptical about the golfing ability of the American women professional golfers. Fred Corcoran, the first Commissioner of the U.S. Women's Association responded. He challenged Crawley's disrespect for women golfers by asserting that American professional women could beat any team of British male amateurs Crawley could put together as a team. A match between a team of six British male golfers and six American women was arranged.

The American women's team of Babe Zaharias, Betty Jameson, Peggy Kirk, Betty Bush, Patty Berg and Betsy Rawls made the trip to England to play the six British Walker Cup male stars at the Wentworth Golf Club. The Babe requested to be matched against Crawley. The American women swept the British male stars 6 matches to 0, with the Zaharias with a 74 from the back tees on one of the most challenging courses in the country. After this historic golf match in which the women golfers did not allow the British men to win a single match dispelling the long standing assertion that could not compete with men on the golf course.

Mildred Didrikson Zaharias—better known by the nickname “Babe”—was born on June 26, 1911, in Port Arthur, Texas was a gifted athlete. She won an unprecedented 82 amateur and professional tournaments before her untimely death at age 45. She was once named by the Associated Press as the “Woman Athlete of the Half Century” and went on to be a founding member of the LPGA and the LPGA's winningest golfer.¹¹



Mildred “Babe” Didrikson Zaharias shows off her winning golf swingⁱⁱⁱ

¹⁰ Janke, Ken, *Firsts, Facts, Feats & Failures in the World of Golf*: John Wiley & Sons, page 177. December, 2006.

¹¹ History, Andrews, Evan, “10 Things you May Not Know About Babe Didrikson Zaharias, June 24, 2016, <http://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-babe-didrikson-zaharias>

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Babe Zaharias and her teammates put to rest the long held belief that women lacked the physical, emotional and competitive will to compete at the highest level in golf. With that myth dispelled, the discussion could move forward toward women getting the respect they are entitled to as golfers, that women with an interest in the sport could compete with men if they had a will to and that the only thing that can keep women from becoming a major force in gold is the inability of the golf industry to make the accommodations required to make women feel welcome on the golf course and design golf instruction programs based on the interests of the female golfer.

Not only has the LPGA gone on to prove the ability to play the game at the highest levels, it has also helped change the image of women on the golf course. In the past women golfers were expected to be seen and not heard and were required to wear conservative clothing in keeping with the norms of the day. The photos below show some of the changes that have occurred over the past 100 years.



1908 Golf Attire



1901 Golf Attire^{iv}



1950s Golf Attire



Contemporary Golf Attire^v

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Over time both the image of the female golfer has not only changed on the golf course, but in the media and as attractive celebrities.

The advent of the LPGA's interest in modernizing the image of women golfers and capitalizing on the attractive and popular young golfers today resulted in further advances in how women golfers were perceived. The media has played a significant roll in this image change as exemplified by Golf Digest Magazine's portrayal of some of the LPGA's most attractive golfers and witnessed by the stir among golfers and the golf industry by featuring female golfers on its magazine cover dressed in provocative garb other than their usual golf attire. The picture on the cover of Golf Digest's May 2015 edition of Lexi Thomson is testimony to the change in the image of women in golf. Clearly the image of women in golf has changed in the world of women's golf since Lord Moncrieff's decree.



May 2015 edition of Golf Digest cover advances the image of women in golf^{vi}

Not only can women golfers look good on and off of the golf course but many familiar with women who play the game would argue that all things being equal, women could compete with and in many cases out score men. While doing so it is likely that they would respect the spirit of the game without the need for profane outbursts after a missed shot, the need to smoke a smelly cigar, claim they had miraculously found their golf ball when it had clearly been lost and find it necessary to drink a beer or two to calm their nerves during the round.

It may be hard for some to understand why so few women play golf today. The answer may lie in the "Gentleman Only" culture that since the inception of the game had been the norm. Women just didn't think of golf as a women's sport resulting in women never having had a lot of interest in golfing. This is not because they can't be good golfers, but more likely due to a lack of golf programs designed

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specifically for women. This has reduced their interest in spite of the fact that so many of those who ignored the anti-women attitude that has been pervasive in golf have learned the game, had a lot of fun and became extremely successful in playing the game.¹²

Unfortunately as recently as 2003 top male golfers including Vihay Singh and Nick Price criticized Annika Sorenstam, the world's leading woman golfer, for daring to tee up in the all-male PGA Bank of America Colonial tournament. The argument by many was that the PGA is for men and the LPGA is for women.

Interestingly, then world #1 golfer Tiger Woods came to Sorensen's defense by stating Singh's comments were "very unfortunate" and "I don't think his is a widely-held view. My message to Annika is 'just go and play'." The world's #4 Phil Mickelson suggested that Sorenstam was fighting inbuilt sexism among his fellow pros. He added "If there is a female good enough to compete, I think she should," adding "...I have a hard time understanding the other side of it."¹³

Today women make up just 25% of adults over 18 playing golf. Recent research from Golf Datatech, notes that golf growth remains flat with rounds nationally up just 1 percent in 2016 compared to 2015. These numbers are part of the reason why gloom-and-doom attitudes still plague the industry. However this does not need to be the future for golf.¹⁴ Ironically, it is women golfers who in the past have been discouraged from playing the game who can halt the decline in golf and bring an era of extraordinary growth and a new prosperity to the golf industry.

The golf industry needs to take note that the less active male and less interested-in-golf male generation is here with us. They ask "what has rendered golf in such a decline?" One expert observes that the decline is in great part due to "poorly organized and ineffective programs for ...women".¹⁵

One might ask why the golf industry has not recognized the potential of the women golfer market to not only end the decline but produce a dramatic increase in golf course visitor rates and attractive new revenues for golf clubs, golf resorts and the golf industry in general.

An analysis of the impact that woman have had in other circumstances when liberated from being denied their right to equal access and given the opportunity to participate provides evidence of what might be achieved if the golf industry ends its defacto discrimination against women and begins to provide creative programs specifically targeted at getting more women playing golf.

One example is the dramatic growth in the women's turnout when granted the right to vote. Until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920 women did not vote. Over the next 40 years women demonstrated how they would react when restrictions were lifted. In 1980 women surpassed men in voter turnout.¹⁶ In 2016 63.3% woman voted compared to 59.3% of

¹² Op cit., Janke, Ken.

¹³ The Telegraph, Lusher, Adam, "Golf's leading men outraged at teeing off with a woman", May 18, 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1430460/Golfs-leading-men-outraged-at-teeing-off-with-a-woman.html>

¹⁴ Golf Advisor, <https://www.golfadvisor.com/articles/2016-golf-trends-16189.htm>

¹⁵ American Censorship, Paul, George "Why Is the Game of Golf In Decline In America?", October 7, 2015, <http://americancensorship.org/game-golf-decline-america/>

¹⁶ Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, "Voting gender gap in the United States", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

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their male counterparts. Is it possible that the number of women who play golf could eventually surpass the number of men who play the game? As in golf, critics who opposed granting women the right to vote argued that the woman's place was in the home (sound familiar) and that women were not interested, sufficiently educated nor emotionally capable of adding value to the political process. Today, more women than men turn out to vote.

The growth of women's participation in in the labor force since the end of World War II and the changing of the culture that, like in golf, believed the women's place was in the home provides another example. Over the past 70 years, women's participation in labor force activities has greatly expanded. As this attitude toward women in the labor force began to change women entered the work force in greater numbers and their participation rose rapidly from the 1960s through the 1980s. In 2014 the number of women in the labor force exceeded men reaching 57% a growth of 24% since 1946. Given the same opportunity to play golf is it likely that women would approach a similar gain in participation? If so what might the impact be on the golf industry?

When golf arrived in the United States in the late 1800s a women's primary job was as a housewife with the prevailing thought being that golf was a man's game and the women's place was in the home.

The examples above would suggest that once the barriers to women's participation in golf are recognized and lifted that an insurgence of new golfers could be achieved that which could result in dramatic growth and extraordinary financial gain for the golf industry. To determine the validity of this proposition programs must be created that are women centered and the industry must reach out to women based on these new programs.

To provide further support to this idea, American women now represent 5 Trillion of economic spending. They are an incredible source of business and for the most part it is woman who makes the vacation decisions. Miklós Breitner a senior marketing professional with extensive experience in the golf industry observes "In many instances women as source of revenue is neglected or untapped, like in the golf industry". He goes on to say "Although the golf business has been dominated by male participation, we should not neglect female golfers. They are representing 19.3% of all golfers. Just in the US there is a potential 38 million women who are open to golf". These data would suggest that the women's market is ready to be tapped and that it is only for the golf industry to figure out how to tap it.

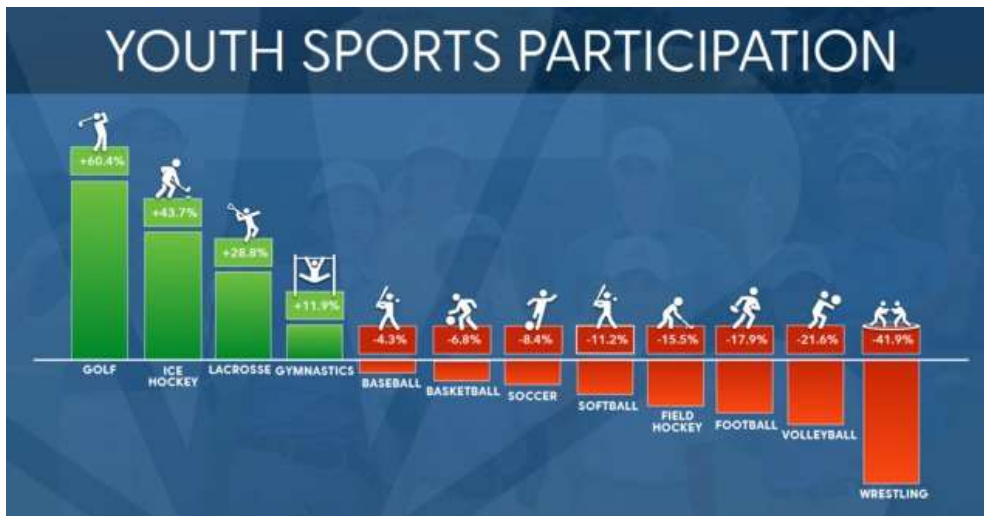
Is there a model that the golf industry might adopt to guide the process needed to increase women's interest in playing golf?

Indeed there is! The dramatic growth in the participation of youth golfers provides an excellent example of how programs tailored to meet the specific interests of the golfer market can dramatically grow participation, and the results that might be achieved if this type of program is implemented.

Prior to the advent of The First Tee established by the World Golf Foundation in November 1997 the involvement of youth in golf was barely significant. In just 20 years the total number of youngsters participating in The First Tee reached 4.1 million, the most in the program's history. The PGA Junior League Golf reports a 300% increase over the past three years, from 9,000 young golfers on 740 teams in 2013 to 36,000 youngsters on 2,900 teams in 2016.

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More specifically, the LPGA and USGA Girls Golf program continues to grow from 4,000 participants in 2010 to 40,000 in 2015 a 1000% increase. The chart below documents the growth performance of youth participation in golf compared to other popular sports programs.¹⁷



The growth in junior golf has dramatically outperformed all other youth sports programs.^{vii}

The fact that similar growth to that achieved by First Tee Program was experienced by the LPGA and USGA Girls Program tends to confirm and validate the potential for similar growth to be achieved in women participation in golf if a similar model is followed.

Were the results achieved by First Tee and LPGA and USGA Girls Golf program duplicated in golf the impact on the golf industry could be revolutionary leading to extraordinary growth and prosperity for the industry.

If Breitner is correct, and programs targeted specifically toward attracting women to golf based on the First Tee and LPGA Girls Golf Program models could generate an increase from 22.5%¹⁸ to 44% adding 13,050,000 new women golfers. At an average tee time cost rate of \$60.00¹⁹ the new revenues generated for golf courses could result in an increase in tee time sales by \$783,000,000 in new tee time sales.

Further, if these models were followed and similar results achieved the number of new women golfers might grow to an extraordinary 22,475,000 women golfers generating a growth in new tee time sales alone of \$1.4 billion. These tee time sales could be doubled by related pro shop, 19th hole food and beverage and overnight stay sales.

If women's interest in the game of golf paralleled their performance as voters (and golf is clearly more fun than voting), it is not unrealistic to predict that in the future the number of women playing golf could be greater than the number of men.

¹⁷ Golf Advisor, Deegan, Jason Scott, "Looking Back: The 10 encouraging golf trends that caught our attention in 2016", December 13, 2016, <https://www.golfadvisor.com/articles/2016-golf-trends-16189.htm>

¹⁸ The Statistics Portal, "Number of people who played golf within the last 12 months in the United States from spring 2008 to spring 2017 (in millions)", 2017, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/227420/number-of-golfers-usa/>

¹⁹ Golfweek, Rose, M.L. "The Average Cost for a Round of Golf", <http://golftips.golfweek.com/average-cost-round-golf-20670.html>

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Once the golf industry comes to the realization that the women's market segment represents this extraordinary growth potential an economic revolution may occur in golf.

One golf expert agrees, "You need to find out what (women) want out of the game, what makes them happy to come to the golf course on a regular basis, what you need to do to make them feel wanted, how to reduce the intimidation factor and most importantly how to make the game of golf fun for them. He also suggests that more women golfers could be a magnet for attracting more male golfers. He suggests "Where there are more women, there are more men!"²⁰

What are some of the benefits that can come to women who decide to play golf?

Women are clearly different than men in terms of what might interest them in playing golf. Women will be sensitive to the fact that the game can be very intimidating for beginners; women will not want to embarrass themselves in the eyes of their playing partners: women will be more concerned about how they look on the golf course than men; women will have less interest in how far they can hit the ball and more interest in how they look doing it; and women will be less interested in the competition and who is winning and more interest in enjoying being on the course and having fun.

Men are less likely to pay a lot of attention to the beauty of the day and the golf course while women will find a nice day and a beautiful golf course one of the joys of playing the game. Predictably, socializing will tend to be of more interest to the female golfer both on the golf course and at the 19th hole following a round of golf while men will be inclined to focus on the game and their performance. These differences need to be taken into consideration as golf clubs design programs tailored to the interest of women and to attract women golfers to learn to play the game.

As long ago as 2013 a Forbes article argued that women could be both a vehicle of dramatic growth but attractive to women. The article said "The sport requires finesse instead of brute strength; it's social; it's played in some of the most beautiful settings on earth; it's coed; the fashion is great; and cocktails and conversation await the end of every game. So why aren't more women playing? "Our research shows that there are millions of women who want to participate in golf, but they don't feel welcome. They haven't been invited."²¹

Professional women do recognize the value of golf as a vehicle to advance their careers. Research tells reports that 86% of the women felt sports helped them to become more disciplined; 81% felt participating in sports helped them function better as team players in the workplace; 69% of the women felt sports helped them develop leadership skills; 68% of the women believed their past in sports helped them learn to deal with failure; and 59% of the women thought sports gave them a competitive edge over others in the business world.²² Women in business have learned they can expand their opportunities for advancement by being on the golf course with decision makers when their counterparts who do not play golf are denied this opportunity.

²⁰ Golfdom, Woodward, Mark, "Shouldn't ladies lead the way to golf growth?", October 21, 2013, <http://www.golfdom.com/shouldnt-ladies-lead-the-way-to-golf-growth/>

²¹ Forbes, Brennan, Bridget, "PGA Looks to Women to Grow Golf", February 7, 2013, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bridgetbrennan/2013/02/07/pga-looks-to-women-to-grow-golf/#66ef5e9252bb>

²² The First Tee, Breitmoser, Chance, "Why Should Girls Play Sports Like Golf?", March 21, 2016, <https://thefirsttee.org/2016/03/21/girls-play-sports-golf/>

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The opportunity to find a quality relationship with a member of the opposite sex may be a primary motivator for a woman to learn the game. Dating today for women is a challenge for many women. Online dating has eased the need to seek a companion in a social club or bar. However both of these options challenge the women seeking a male relationship to identify men who have the qualities that they hope to find in a mate. Both of these venues are populated by men who are dishonest about themselves and what they value in a relationship.

In contrast men significantly outnumber women on the golf course and represent a demographic that most women would find attractive. The profile of the male golfer tells women that 32% are single, 67% have college degrees, most are professionals with 50% holding white-collar positions and are financially secure with the median household income for U.S. golfers being over \$100,000 annually.²³

More importantly, golf is a game that will bring out the best and the worst of most golfers. A women looking for a male companion can observe the true nature of most of the men they play golf with. If the man they are paired with on the course is honest, respectful, engages in proper golf etiquette, controls his temper, does not use offensive language and demonstrates concern for preserving the environment and is more interested in having fun than achieving the ultimate score it is likely he will have those same values in a relationship and in life. It is hard for most men (and women) who play golf to mask their true character and personality, a refreshing thought for most women looking for a quality relationship with a man.



Couple enjoying a round of golfⁱⁱⁱ

Golf Digests' Stina Sternberg agrees. She advises that that a golf date can be and a valuable and delicate experience. She says "In a short amount of time, your date will be exposed to all your personality traits, even those you'd hoped to keep hidden. There's no disguising who you really are on the golf course." The same is true of your date's behavior. She goes on to note "My last golf date went so well - we're now married with two kids." If the date doesn't go well the women has only invested 4 or 5 hours in

²³ Credi Donkey, Lake, Rebecca, "23 Golf Player Demographic Statistics That Might Surprise You", April 11, 2015, <https://www.creditdonkey.com/golf-player-demographic.html>

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determining the potential of a relationship or that a relationship will not work, compared to wasting months and sometimes years in finding out the truth about a male companion away from the golf course.

While no solid research could be found on the topic, it would appear that married couples who play golf together stay together. Indeed, while the largest percentage of golfers is composed of men between the ages of 18 and 59, and seniors easily outnumber younger players. The average age of golfers in the U.S. is 54.²⁴ When a male and female twosome is observed on the golf course it is likely to be an older couple who have learned that it is more fun to play together and compete against their individual GHIN handicaps and reinforcing the quality of the relationship rather than for one of the partners remaining at home, feeling left out and missing out on an enjoyable and healthful outdoor experience tapped off with a few adult beverages at the 19th hole. Just think of the potential; more women playing golf may lead to happier marriages and a reduction in the divorce rate.

Based on the information detailed in this article it is clear that the “gentleman only women forbidden” culture has which has prevailed in golf has been a major deterrent to women having an interest or being attracted to the game of golf. It is difficult to understand why the golf industry has not recognized the extraordinary business growth opportunity that could be achieved were this culture to be abandoned and programs were developed based on the First Tee and LPGA Girls Program to attract and educate women as to the fun they could have on the golf course.

In an effort to increase women’s participation in golf the author has written a book entitled “The Women’s Guide to Learning to Play Golf for Fun.” The book is tailored to address the question “Why should a women play golf?” based on a women’s interest and needs, and how learning to play golf might be achieved without being intimidated by the game or having to contend with the obstacles that have caused women in the past to not consider golf as a sport of interest.

In the final analysis having more women play golf could be a win, win, win situation for the women who discover the fun associated with the great game of golf, the golf industry by capitalizing on an extraordinary new growth opportunity and for men who play the game by having a more attractive option for a golf partner.

So the challenge to the golf industry is to get their heads out of the sand, wake up to the opportunity and begin to design and offer marketing and instructional programs that would create interest on the part of the millions of women who are interested in playing golf.

Ladies, grab your golf clubs, head out to the golf course and join in the fun!

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²⁴ Credit Donkey, Lake, Rebecca, “23 Golf Player Demographic Statistics that Might Surprise You,” April 11, 2015, <https://www.creditdonkey.com/golf-player-demographic.html>

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