

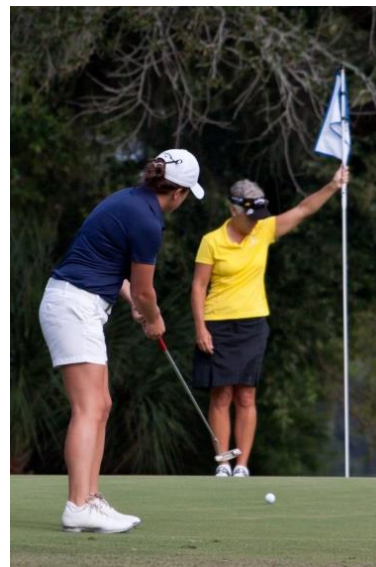
89% of respondents believe that playing a sport together was an effective strategy for promoting positive work relationships.

89% of golfers believe that they were effective in using golf as a tool to leverage their career.

Background

Women's participation in golf has grown over the last six years according to the National Golf Foundation¹ with approximately 5.8 million women participating as on-course golfers. Women are likely drawn to golf for similar reasons as men; mental and physical health benefits, reduced stress levels, exercise, and more time spent outdoors with friends and family (Syngenta, 2014). Despite growth in the number of women golfing, women are still underrepresented on the golf course making up about 24% of all golfers. Some researchers have suggested that the game of golf is one of the last bastions where discrimination is permitted, demonstrating strict adherence to tradition and severe resistance to change (Arthur, Van Buren III, & Del Campo, 2009). Also, a variety of structural issues impact levels of golf participation including time, access, cost, as well as perception of image, and normative gender roles (The International Institute for Golf Education, 2018).

Previous research concludes that there is a positive correlation between golf and business, as both business professionals and golf players seek ways to form and strengthen relationships. Different from other sports, a single round of golf may last hours and is a viable venue to develop and reinforce relationships with business associates (Barnes, et al, 2014). Therefore, "there may be even more of a benefit for females than males" to play (Andrews, 2012; Barnes, et al., 2014). An estimated 90% of Fortune 500 females in CEO positions play golf (Lepore, 2011). Female executives reap career benefits from sport participation in general (Ernest and Young, 2014), suggesting that golf may provide a social capital for women that fosters career outcomes in the executive labor market (Agarwal, Quian, Reeb, & Foo Sing, 2015). Executive women report that sports helped them to become more disciplined, function better on workplace teams, develop leadership skills, learn to deal with failure, and gave them a competitive edge (Breitmoser, 2016).



Study

Wellesley College surveyed 213 golfers and non-golfers. The majority of respondents were female (89%) and employed outside of the home (72%). Age ranged from 18-65 year and older, 23% were between 25-34, 16% were between 35-44, 20% were between 45-54, 25% were between the age of 55-64, and 16% were under 25 or older than 65. Twenty-six percent (26%) of survey respondents were in the Education or Training field, 26% reported working in Business Management and Administration, Finance, Marketing, Sales and Service, and the remaining 47% were in other fields such as, the Arts, Health Science, Information Technology, or Law Enforcement. Most of the respondent's held Bachelor's Degrees or higher. Household income fell between \$40,000 to \$160,000 for 67% of the respondents.

¹ <https://www.ngf.org/golf-industry-research/#golfers> accessed January 2019

83% of non-golfers commented that not being able to play golf can create a feeling of being left out.

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“Good women golfers have opportunities and confidence to play with men and that is an empowering feeling. If you’re a golf equal, it seems you get respect.”

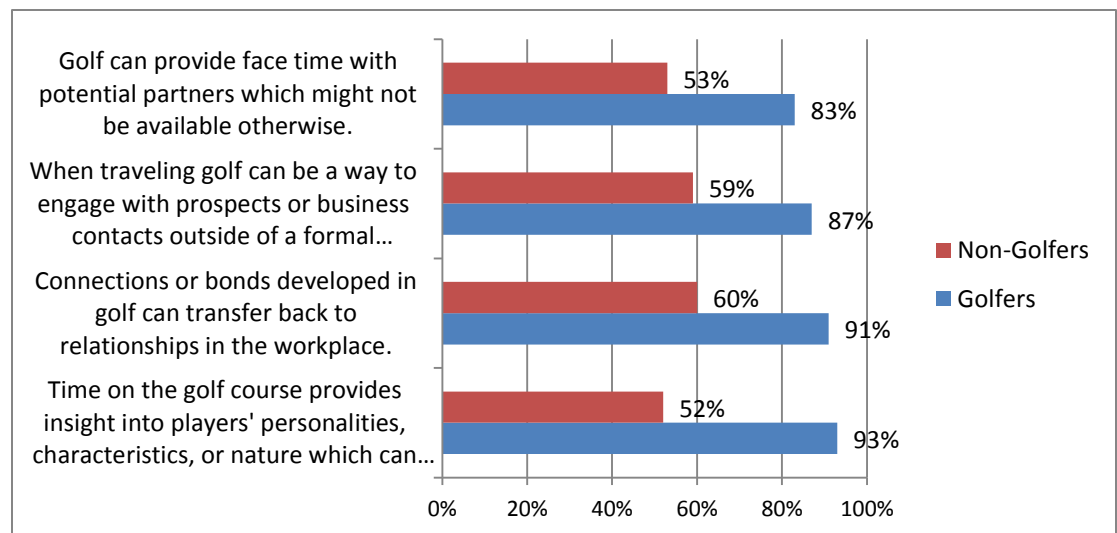
Of the respondents who reported playing golf, 56% had been playing for more than ten years, and 40% of those golfers reported playing between one and a few times each week. Participants were invited to the survey via several college related listservs and were permitted to share the survey link with other colleagues which probably accounts for the preponderance of female respondents. The survey remained open for four weeks. Data analysis was conducted with a focus on the female respondents.

Identifying the Benefits of Golf Play

Across multiple industries, networking is understood as an important business function that can help expand client base by reaching more customers or partners, expanding knowledge, and working towards building organization growth and profits. When asked about strategies to promote business/work relationships, survey respondents gave the highest ratings to dining out, playing a sport together, and meeting for coffee/tea. Despite societal transition to more online formats and popular social media sites and professional social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest, golfers still perceived golf to be a major asset in establishing and strengthening business and workplace relationships.

Golfers strongly agreed about the potential benefits of golf as a relationship building strategy. All of the golfer respondents agreed that time spent on the golf course can provide insight into player’s personalities and characteristics which can later inform business relationships and how the connections or bonds developed on the golf course can transfer back to business and workplace relationships. Golfers were also in high agreement that the golf environment can provide a casual background to discuss and foster business relationships, golf can provide face time with potential business that may not otherwise be available, and how when traveling golf can be a way to engage with business contacts outside of a formal meeting. Most non-golfers reported these benefits as well, but for golfers having the experience of playing golf with others vastly strengthen their positive perceptions of the relationship between golf and business.

Figure 1. Women Golfers and Non-Golfers: Relationships between Golf and Business Networking. Percent “Agree very much” or “Agree”



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“I have found it invaluable for networking.”

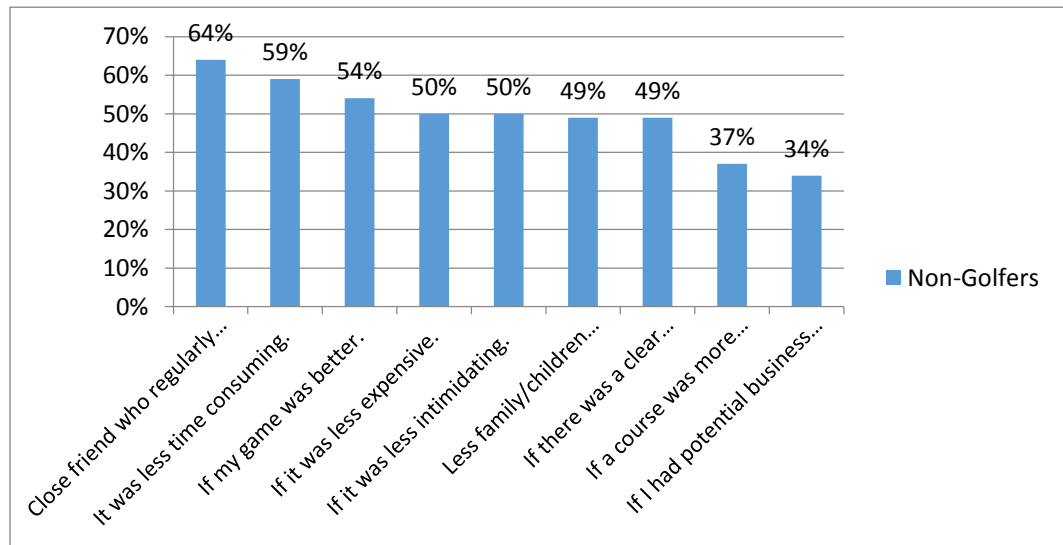
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“I use golf to develop friendships with clients. It is a chance to humanize a financial arrangement.”

Getting to the Fairway

Non-golfers were asked to comment about the barriers they perceive to playing golf. Sixty-four percent of non-golfers agreed they would be more interested in playing golf if they had a close friend who regularly golfed. More than half reported they would be more interested in playing golf if it was less time consuming or if their golf game was better. Fifty percent (50%) reported their interests may change if golf was less expensive and less intimidating. Fifty percent (50%) reported their interests may change if golf was less expensive and less intimidating.

Figure 2. Conditions Reported by Non-golfers for Increasing Participation. Percent “Agree very much,” “Agree,” or “Somewhat Agree”



Golf is one of the longest standing sport institutions in the world. Although the United States Golf Association was created in the 1890s, it was not until 1950 that the Ladies’ Professional Golf Association (LPGA) was created. Numerous growth and development programs have since emerged to guide and encourage women and girls to the game of golf. These data suggest that there are valuable connections for workplace relationship building and networking forged on the golf fairway, and women who do not play golf may be missing out on opportunities to foster the exchange of information and ideas that build profitable social and business connections.

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This Research Snapshot was prepared by the Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College. For more information on the research findings contact Georgia Hall, Ph.D., Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, ghall@wellesley.edu or 781.283.2530.