

# **“Didn’t know she could shout that loud”: the performance of fandom among women followers of women’s golf**

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## **Abstract**

While a growing body of evidence exists around women fans of men’s sport, less is known about women fans’ perspectives and identities in relation to women’s sport, and what is known tends to focus on homogenous representations of sports fans, rather than a diversity of fan types and follower styles (Pope 2017). Building on the authors’ previous appraisals of the Solheim Cup – the biggest event in women’s golf – this paper examines fan performances of women at the 2019 event in Scotland. Twenty-five white women from the UK/Europe were recruited via social media before, during and after the Solheim Cup, with online interviews taking place in the following days. Using performative sports fandom as a framework the authors seek to examine women fan performances at a major women’s sporting event. The analysis of the interviews resulted in three themes around (1) friendship, care, and connection, (2) negotiated fan performances and (3) distinctive fan performances. While it must be acknowledged that this is a homogenous group of fans, it is hoped that this research will add to the understanding of the diversity and complexity of fan identities.

## **Introduction**

Research examining women fans of sport is gathering pace in the literature, with the growth in female fans referred to by Pope (2017) as the feminisation of sports fandom. Much of the research on women fans is focused on followers of men's football, e.g., Pfister and Pope (2018), Jakubowska et al. (2021), Mintert and Pfister (2015) Pfister et al. (2013), Pope and Kirk, (2014), Kunert, (2021), Toffoletti and Mewett (2012), or men's team sport more generally, e.g., Richards et al. (2020) and Sveinson and Hoeber (2015). Much less is known about women followers of women's sport and what is known tends to focus on homogenous representations and assumptions, rather than a diversity of fan types, follower styles and fan experiences (Pope 2017). The aim of this research is to examine women fan performance at a major women's sporting event. Along with adding to other fan research in Leisure Studies, including studies on hegemonic male culture e.g., Walser et al., (2021), Caudwell (2011), minority fan experiences, e.g., Desjardins (2021) and female fans, e.g., Pope and Williams (2011), Sveinson and Hoeber (2015), this paper adds to the understanding of the perspectives, identities, and persuasions of female fans of both women's sport and an individual sport. For the purposes of this study, and unlike research that focuses on 'female fans' here-to-fore, the authors have chosen the term 'women fans' as a more inclusive effort at recognising those fans who might identify as non-binary.

Serious sports fandom is typically associated with men's sport as 'real sport' where men are constructed as experts; this gendered construction of sports fan identities can impact women's empowerment through sport (Meân, 2012). While male fans are regularly termed 'authentic' or real fans, female fans have been portrayed as non-fans, football widows, illegitimate fans,

and are often othered and can feel marginalised within these discourses (Pope, 2010, Osborne and Coombs, 2013, Crawford and Gosling, 2004, Sveinson and Hoeber, 2016, Wenner, 2012). Further, given the nature of the women's sport fandom taking place in male dominated spaces, women fans often operate in hegemonic environments, where sexist and misogynistic commentary can be normalised (Hoeber and Kerwin, 2013). Some research has found that female fans who themselves experience exclusion can be the first to reaffirm hegemonic practices and discourses (Richards et al., 2020, Jones, 2008). Esmonde et al. (2015) contend that the inclusion of women in spaces such as sports fan communities does not in itself shift hegemonic discourses of fandom. Given that this research takes place at a major women's sporting event it could be considered that this space might have the potential to disturb or shift these prevailing hegemonic relations amongst fans.

If studies on women fans of women's sport are a rarity, even more so are examinations of women fans following individual women athletes and attending a major women's sporting event. The biennial Solheim Cup is the biggest event in women's golf, where professional players from the USA and Europe face each other over three days. The tournament was founded in 1990 as a replica of the men's Ryder Cup, a biennial team golf tournament pitting 12 Americans against 12 Europeans in direct match-play. Marketed as the biggest rivalry in women's golf, the Solheim Cup was first staged in Florida in 1990 and has been dominated by the United States. In September 2019, the sixteenth Solheim event was held at Gleneagles in Scotland, nineteen years since the country last hosted the event and five years after Gleneagles hosted the 2014 Ryder Cup. This paper forms part of a wider project by the authors around the 2019 Solheim Cup, which includes an analysis of the strategies used by Scottish policy makers around the event (reference removed) and gendered media representations (reference removed). Using performative sports fandom as a framework, this article focuses on the fan performances of women spectators at the 2019 Solheim Cup.

## **Defining women fandom and fan femininities**

Esmonde et al. (2015) suggest that fandom is defined in multiple and contradictory ways and should be conceptualised as an assembly of diverse and contested activities; in this way, they also suggest that women do not form a distinct group of fans with shared interests, practices, or desires, and that there is no woman centric way of being a fan. Despite this assertion there has been some attempts at defining women fan types. In their exploration of female fans, participants in the study by Sveinson and Hoeber (2015) suggested that a fan is one who enjoys the sport/team, wears team colours, and demonstrates positive support. Richards et al. (2020) identify four female fan types: the bring a bub (child) fan, the social fan (accessory type), army foot soldier fan (more authentic than social fans), and the pink and proud fan (displaying emphasised femininity). The model of female fandom in football and rugby union by Pope (2017) alludes to 'hot' committed female fans along a continuum to 'cool' more casual female supporters, demonstrating the variety of female fan attachments. Pope also contends that there is a wide breadth of fan types within this continuum, from those who are less engaged to those with high levels of identification, visibility, and emotional attachment.

Women fans have also been defined in relation to the hegemony in heteronormative, feminised depictions (Gieseler, 2017). Using her 2013 work, Pope (2017) devised a schematic framework for examining how femininity was constructed or performed by female fans through their attachments to male sports; the framework argued for two female fan types: 'masculine' femininities as displayed by 'hot' fans and 'feminine' femininities as exhibited by 'cool' fans, with the caveat of considerable 'blurring' between the categories. Also related to fan femininities, Sveinson and Hoeber (2016) found that accepted norms of female fan femininity

depended on the context, but that in general female fans feel more accepted when they take on more masculine qualities in their performance of fandom.

Neo-liberal and marketing discourses also shape the representation and women fans particularly related to large sports events. Toffoletti (2017b) interrogates the sexy body as a new source of feminine sport fan identity in the media, whereby this fan has emerged in the context of postfeminism as a necessary type of feminine fan identity to meet the needs of the global sport economy. Similarly, Toffoletti (2017a) argues that diverse representations of women global fans ahead of the 2015 Cricket World Cup relies on the myth of sport as an equaliser, bringing diverse groups of people together. This evidence is significant given the event nature of the Solheim Cup, one of the biggest women's sports events globally.

### **Golf (and the Solheim Cup) as a unique site for the expression of fan identities**

In their study examining female fans of rugby union, Pope and Williams (2011) suggest that different sports imbue different meanings and cultures of fans. While there has been little written around golf fan identities, some evidence exists around the motivation of golf fans, some of which is directly related to the marketing of the sport. Robinson et al. (2004) found that vicarious achievement explained fans' identification with golfers, tours and the local community and they encouraged marketers to focus on specific golfers and places in promoting tournaments. Wann et al. (2008) found that golf fans convey high levels of aesthetic motivation around well-executed golf swings, and low on group affiliation motivation, eustress, and entertainment, when compared with most team sports. Using this evidence, it is likely that the golf fans at this tournament are drawn towards a combination of the individual, the place, and the fan community. In studying a specific biennial golf event taking place across

3 days, this chapter could make a novel contribution to the literature around fandom both within golf and beyond.

Golf settings are sites that are largely considered male dominated and controlled. From gendered scorecards, tee boxes, inadequate facilities and the lack of gender specific merchandise, equipment and products, the presentation of golf is regarded as normatively male (Hundley, 2004, Arthur et al., 2011). Men are more likely to have more access to the privileges associated with power and decision making in golf environments, while this male valorisation will mean that women in golf are often positioned as the 'other', whereby their involvement is deemed different, unexpected, or less important (Kitching, 2017; reference removed). This gendered cultural context further underlines the specific merits of the current investigation of women fandom at the Solheim Cup, an event which showcases professional women golfers. Todd Crosset knows this space very well given his ethnographic research on the LPGA tour, and in his chapter on fan-athlete relations within the LPGA he found there to be a system of reciprocity between fans and players, whereby athletes 'gift' their talent and status, while fans gift their appreciation and time (Crosset 1999). Investigating women fan performance at a women's sporting event such as the Solheim Cup has the potential to extend the evidence around the connections between women athletes and women fans, in turn broaden narratives of fandom related to sports events.

The unique setting, staging and space in which the fandom takes place is also important to consider. Richards et al. (2020) found that performances of fandom are largely dependent on the spatial location in the stadium and the cultural norms associated with those sites, i.e., where fans choose to watch the match guides expectations of group behaviour. Richards and Parry (2020) also found similar elements in relation to stadium spaces and objects. As before, much of this research has been conducted in popular team sports, but not all sports will resonate with fans in the same way and golf is a sport that is often not associated with tribalism, identities,

and group affiliation (Liston and Kitching, 2019). However, events like the Solheim Cup operate in a (supra)national team format, and not in a stadium or other traditional fan space, making this an unusual fan setting. While there has been some research conducted on the Ryder Cup and national identity, e.g., Steen (2015), Harris et al., (2015), these authors are the first to examine the sociological aspects surrounding the Solheim Cup. The significance of both events are the aspects of fandom that are permissible and that do not ordinarily occur at golf tournaments. Singing, fancy dress, banter, flag waving, drinking and an overall party atmosphere has become more prominent in both the Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup, whilst absent at most other golf tournaments. While the players wear uniforms at the Solheim Cup, these change every day and for every competition, so there are no 'jerseys' but many fans wear flags and the associated (supra-) national colours. The fans at the 2019 Solheim Cup were provided with noise clappers and flags.

### **Theoretical framework and approach**

To this point we have outlined some evidence on how sports (women) fan performance has been shaped through hegemonic practices and discourses at play in sports fandoms. Further, research focusing on male fans and male fan spaces have potentially limited the possibilities and preferences for those who identify in other ways or in other fan spaces. In utilising third wave feminism, (Pope, 2017) suggests that there is a need to move away from gender polarities and homogeneity on assumptions around sports fans, and there should be a recognition of the flexibility and diversity of fan types and supporter styles between and among male and female fans. The role conflict and negotiations of fan roles that exists for some women fans is discussed by Osborne and Coombs (2013), and similarly, Pope and Williams (2011) speak about the contradictory and contested ways that sport spectatorship plays out for female fans, particularly around questions of empowerment and resistance. This research will use

performative sport fandom from Osborne and Coombs (2013) in order to expand on understandings related to women sports fans in a variety of fans spaces.

This articulation of performative sports fandom considers fandom as relational, contextual, and negotiable, whereby fan identity interacts with other constructs such as gender, race, sexual orientation, class, and nationality. Osborne and Coombs discuss how through the performance of gender, the understanding and experience of the fans shifts, demonstrating the complexity of fan experiences and behaviours. While it may be suggested that this framework is better suited to more third wave perspectives, stepping outside gender binaries and offering potential to disrupt the longstanding patterns of sport and masculinity (Thorpe et al., 2017, Bruce, 2016), given the homogenous profile of participants attending this event, we argue that a more second wave feminism approach is more complementary, though there should always be room for a diverse and wide range of articulations, contradictions and contestations around women fandom.

In the examination of women fan performance, it is possible that there are fan performances that are valorised or denounced and there may be gendered scripts that women fans follow, resist, or are constrained by, while some women fans might experience conflict with another aspect of their identities. Through this examination we wish to realise the diverse and shifting perspectives, the multiple truths and messy/contested realities, contradictions, and tensions within these transnational participants' experiences of fandom.

## **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were carried out by the first and second authors with women fans. Given the wider Solheim project examined by the authors, the interview guide consisted of questions within 5 main sections, (1) participants' socialisation into golf and golf fandom, (2)



the Solheim event, (3) following women's professional golf, (4) team Europe/USA and (5) identities. Ethical approval for the research was granted from both the first and second authors' research ethics committees (numbers A19-062EX and 18/19-81v2 respectively).

### ***Fan recruitment and participants***

The authors planned to advertise for fan recruitment before, during and after the Solheim Cup event, and posted recruitment adverts over Twitter, including a "Calling all Solheim Cup fans" image. The advertisement was shared by well-known European golfers and the most viewed tweet was seen 29,245 times. The same image was also distributed in hard copy at the Solheim Cup event itself by one of the research participants who had signed up prior to the event having seen the Twitter advertisement and offered to spread the word at the event. The inclusion criteria were (i) attendee at the 2019 Solheim Cup in Gleneagles, (ii) aged 18 or over, (iii) fluent in English. While not all participants were asked how they heard about this recruitment, the interviewers were told in some cases that they saw the Twitter advert, and in other cases they were notified through their networks; therefore, snowball sampling took place. Twenty-five participants ranging from 22-71 years old were recruited and signed electronic informed consent forms to participate. Individual semi-structured interviews took place over the phone and/or Skype with women fans ranging in length from 30 minutes to 62 minutes and averaging at 45 minutes. The interviews were carried out by the first two authors, on the weeks following the 2019 Solheim Cup tournament.

All participants were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity (see Table 1). As can be seen, participants were asked about their employment status and the majority of participants had retired from work or were working full time, with 3 working part time and one semi-retired. A cursory look indicates that the majority of professions are related to lower to higher managerial and professional occupations. Thus, along with the travel/accommodation costs associated with

attending major sporting events (Osborne and Coombs, 2013), it is possible that these fans have access to the required economic, social, and cultural resources to attend an event such as the Solheim Cup.

*[Table 1 near here]*

### ***Data analysis and presentation***

In line with performative sports fandom, the authors were interested in examining the roles undertaken by women fans, how these roles are performed, how roles are negotiated both internally and externally and what happens when roles conflict. Data analysis followed the interpretive and reflexive approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019), from familiarisation, reading and re-reading, to coding, and then generating, developing, and reviewing themes. Two researchers were involved in a collaborative coding process in order to gain a deeper reading of the data. Through these reading and re-reading collaborative processes, the authors generated three categories of fan performances (1) friendship, care, and connection, (2) negotiated fan performances and (3) distinctive fan performances. The next section details participants' comments and is followed by a section discussing the processes of role performance, negotiation, and conflict in women fan performances.

### **Results**

The 2019 Solheim Cup will go down in memory, whereby after 3 days of play, 28 matches, and countless golf shots, the outcome of the tournament went down to the final shot in the final match on the final hole, when Suzanne Pettersen sank a putt to win the Cup for Europe. The three themes are elaborated in the ensuing sections.

### *Friendship, care, and connection*

Performative fandom locates fandom outside the individual and, instead, between individuals and with this in mind, friendship was significant in the fans' narratives. Many of the attendees travelled in groups to the event, be that groups from the same golf club, or friends from different locations who had previously attended. The youngest fan Callie mentioned "it looked like a lot of women club members went as a group to the event together...women going on holiday together aged 55-65". Ellie mentioned how surprising it was to see how many women there were watching:

Especially groups of women together. I'm assuming maybe golf clubs coming on trips and things like that. I mean I know in the stands there were a couple with their banners too, y'know the ladies' section of a golf club.

Meeting friends was an important motivation for many fans in attending the event. 6-time attendee Isabelle travelled with a "sort of a miscellaneous group" of friends in golf who volunteered with her. 4-time attendee Jocelyn mentioned "I've always sort of followed golf through friends". Cym said:

Four of us who knew each other, 30 years or so playing golf...I think the motivation was, was a friendship group, but we all played golf, so it was that thing in common.

The fan profile attending the event was described by Elena as a "a massive mix of people" and a number of fans (including Ellie, Chloe and Tanushka) spoke about positive interactions between European fans, and also with American fans:

Judith: It was lovely to be standing with people who were speaking multiple different languages and who were all cheering together and applauding the American good play. It was very good humoured.

Faye: y’know people were kinda bumping into each other but there was no animosity or anything. Y’know British, German, French, Spanish, whatever, Dutch...there was a lot of banter and y’know if you plopped yourself over in the green somewhere to watch for a bit, everyone was chatting between the players coming through and stuff. It was great fun; it was just great fun...

Many fans spoke about the networks of people they know in golf who attended the event. Chloe spoke about “groups who regularly go to the event” and, along with Cym, Jasmine and Kimberly mentioned “you usually see people there that you know”. Some of the fans spoke about how they would use the Solheim Cup event as an opportunity to meet up again with friends from other parts of the world. Candice went with a group of 17 from her golf club and from USA, and Rabhya said, “this time I met friends that we made years ago from Australia...I’ve made great friends through it”. Heidi said:

The highlight was just, yeah, difficult to say but it, it was just being there meeting old friends, y’know meeting new people, new contacts y’know the whole social aspect of it, getting together, y’know everyone being together. That y’know, and getting behind the team of course, yeah it, that was the highlight. And of course, the fact that we won, obviously that beats everything.

Upon Pettersen’s winning putt, Faye, Isabelle, and Lisa mentioned the physical connections between fans. Lily mentioned “you were getting hugs from total strangers, I got so many invites to play [golf] all over the States”. In line with the spiritual nature of the event as mentioned earlier, fans spoke about the connections with each other, regardless of the team they supported.

Cym: it was also fun to meet people out on the fairway...we sat down on the sixteenth hole on one of the days, think we ended up chatting to some Americans...so yeah, I’m, listening to people and talking to people about their

stories and you know...whether they're European or American supporters, they've still got the same kind of connection with, with the game. Just, supporting a different side.

Some fans mentioned how fans were supportive of each other and their needs. Cym described how, after her friend got hit with a golf ball, "there was a sense of care". Kelly described how "everybody was pretty much polite and y'know you were able to hold seats for people, nobody was saying no you can't do that". Faye mentioned:

Everybody got along and had something nice to say to each other and y'know a young man helping an old lady who'd sat down on a cushion and couldn't get back up cause her old legs were a bit stiff or whatever. Everybody smiling, chatting, or saying oh that'll be me soon...

In a connection to the 'bring a bub' theme from Richards et al. (2020) Jasmine and Faye brought their children to the event and appreciated the welcome they received:

Jasmine: It was quite funny, you can see how differently any adult spectator treats kids...my son got given the radio earpiece by someone...they certainly had a very good experience, they could always get to the front of anything, and people would always let small people through.

Faye: in the women's game I do always feel that people are more tolerant of the kids being there in particular, and other people, they're quite more...I guess relaxed is the word I would say.

This evidence indicates the performance of friendship, where social relationships and opportunities to meet took precedence, and how the event provided the opportunity and environment to grow their networks and connections. Care was also an important element, particularly for mothers or more vulnerable women fans.

### *Negotiated fan performances: “Didn’t know she could shout that loud”*

The women fans in this study regularly compared women fan performances with what might be considered typical behaviours from women golfers where they might usually gather. Many participants spoke about the noise levels, which were accepted as an important part of the event.

Callie mentioned fans who were much older than her singing and dancing on the first tee:

The thing that kind of optimised that [fans in their 50s or 60s] for me was sitting on the first tee, they had this playlist going, and it was Abba dancing queen... And music like that, I mean I was looking around and people were in their element, they were loving it.

Elena spoke about being “allowed to” shout and cheer:

It’s a very different experience when you’re allowed [to] shout and cheer and stuff...it’s a big thing that you’re allowed to because they [the players] want that atmosphere, they want that noise...I think it was the first time I’ve ever seen, it was Anne Van Dam, when she was teeing off, and she made everybody cheer whilst she was teeing off.

Commenting on Pettersen holing the final putt, Isabelle said: “the cheer was so loud...I don’t think I’ve experienced anything quite like it before”. Kelly spoke about the noise levels being “respectful”. Similarly, many of the participants spoke about the interactions between fans as a tasteful rivalry. Lily said, “not once did I see or hear anything negative from all these people there” and Andrea said, “there was no kind of animosity at all”. Faye and Candice spoke about it as a friendly banter, as did Rabhya:

And then there's always this banter...on the first tee, the Americans usually take one side, we take another and wherever we are, and we'll have a little sing song... I've never heard any sort of booing or anything and I don't think that would be tolerated by the fans.

Cecile was self-conscious about her singing performances, in comparison with expected behaviours of women golfers:

I'm quite certain that there'll be some people who might see my behaviour at the Solheim Cup that they're kind of quite surprised and, "Didn't know she could shout that loud" and things of that nature. But also groups of eight and twelve middle-aged and above women singing songs and chanting and in fact at one point I think when Celine Boutier was approaching the second green, they started singing the French national anthem and well, not singing it with words but kind of you know humming, making, humming the tune, and you just don't, don't see that very often so...you can let your hair down a little bit more and sort of, what goes on tour, stays on tour, a little bit, that kind of feeling, and it's perhaps a little more unusual, that sort of behaviour from women, particularly that demographic.

Here we can see how behaviours were monitored or negotiated, where fans ensured that behaviours were permissible at the event. Similarly, there was evidence of individual women fans checking themselves, or reflecting on what they or others might consider acceptable in their fan performances particularly in terms of dress and drinking alcohol. Chloe mentioned:

...so, the funniest moment actually was on Saturday...we were sitting up on the ninth... and I'd got binoculars, and Kate turned to me and said, "Are there two bananas walking down?", and there were two bananas walking down! And we

did both sort of say, y'know, when you look at, "Eh, we got fun people in ladies' section", but normally you don't, they're sort of fairly normal, ordinary, fairly quiet people suddenly turned into daffodils with blooms and bananas.

Also in terms of dress, Jocelyn mentioned that some fans were "a little more subdued and ehm, just wore general golf clothes". Similarly, some of the fans tapered their levels of dress. Cym said "I wasn't completely embarrassingly blue and yellow, but I had some". Ellie mentioned "no crazy wigs though", Nyla mentioned "My waterproof is black...I could've gone in something more in tune", and Callie said, "so the only way I showed my colours – I mean I had blue face paint on, I'll admit it." Cecile spoke about the festival spirit, and "once the game's over, you go and have a beer". She also spoke (again) about letting her hair down, which "you don't see that terribly often in women's golf clubs in my experience." When asked about the fan experience at the event, a few fans referred to the lack of drinking stations, but interestingly, they always qualified their comments with a *not that you'd be getting drunk* statement:

Ellie: you felt that there should be more drink stations, potentially y'know, not to get drunk people drunk but y'know more sort of beer and stuff on the course...as I say, *not so people should be completely wasted* watching it.

Cecile: *I'm not wanting to be going and getting stupidly drunk* all the time and being leery out on the course, but...given the likely sort of demographics of the crowd being women, likely to be for the majority, middle-aged and above, the chances of people getting too leery in terms of their behaviour on the course by having alcohol out there, I thought was fairly remote...I mean it wasn't the absolute be-all and end-all, just sort of, it was a little bit disappointing



Nyla: you had one area in the spectator village where you could buy ehm, drinks and food. There was nowhere round the course you could buy alcohol....at all...*not saying that you should.*

This evidence shows how women fans internalised discourses of policing or checking themselves and their fan performances against what might be regarded as acceptable or appropriate everyday behaviours from women golfers in golf settings.

***Distinctive fans: “women like to shop!”***

Golf environments have typically been identified as spaces where power is accrued or exchanged (Kitching, 2011, Hundley, 2004) and there was a level of distinction associated with being a fan at the Solheim Cup. Osborne and Coombs (2013) note the high costs of attending international sports events; tickets for the Solheim event started as low as £10 but given that Gleneagles is up to 70km from the major urban cities of Glasgow/Edinburgh, transport, and accommodation for the 3-day tournament were considerable additional costs. Thus, simply attending the event required access to forms of capital. Rabhya asked the minibus driver to pick them up “at 5:30 in the morning” to get to the first tee. Planning took time; Chloe mentioned that she had “the whole thing organised, planned about a year, fourteen months ago”, while Cecile said:

A female pro at the club organised a trip, with a fellow pro from down in Cambridge, I think, so they sort of said, “Right, you find six people, I’ll find six people and then we’ll sort of take a, take a dozen”.

Some of the attendees travelled as part of a golfing trip to Scotland, possibly indicating the level of resources they had. As mentioned earlier, Kimberly met groups from the US and Europe:

There's so many people that I spoke to, and so many people that I know from our golf club and other golf clubs had gone up to Scotland playing on their way up so they had a week and played in Northumberland and played somewhere else in Scotland, then had gone up to Gleneagles, then played on their way back down so I think people made much more of an event of going to it.

Lisa described these fans as "hardcore golfers, like these are your women that are over 50 going away and like going on trips abroad."

For some fans, their connections to certain players served as part of what made them distinctive, something that Crosset (1999) refers to in terms of LPGA players 'gifting' fans their associated status. Abbie and Cecile had previously known Catriona Matthew, the European captain, who Cecile described as "such a lovely lady". Kelly and Sinead had both caddied for professional women golfers on the Ladies European Tour, whilst Callie had competed against them in the past. At the 2017 edition in the USA, Rabhya told how her, and her group of friends were leaving the venue at the tournament end and the European players spotted them and invited them to the clubhouse for a drink where they met Mike Whan, the commissioner for the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association). Similarly, many of the attendees had strong connections and networks within the golf industry. Candice, Callie, Kelly, Lisa, and Tanushka all work in golf and Tanushka was working at the event and Lily, Isabelle and Sinead were volunteers. Kimberly's husband works for a golf equipment company, Sinead's boyfriend worked for an event sponsor, and the companies that Nyla, Ellie and Chuki work for/own companies that situates their work in golf too. In all, many of the fans alluded to their networks and connections to people and places with more power in golf.

Women fans have been viewed as 'new consumer fans' (Pope, 2010), and have strong associations with their fan apparel (Sveinson et al., 2019) and the quality of the event operation.

Facilities in sports grounds are more important to female fans (McDonald et al., 2018) and Chuki described the toilets as “totally inadequate”, something which was persistently an issue for the fans:

Just generally these toilets probably were designed by men, and they just weren't big enough for larger ladies...Y'know particularly a lot of these women are older, larger ladies...many of them that just y'know you've got a bag on your back, you might have an umbrella and all the rest of it they're just useless.

The element of distinction here came from purchasing merchandise at the event, which they would then wear when they returned to their local golf settings.

Isabelle: I mean people, everybody's asking me about it. When I wear my Solheim top, people say \*gasp\* were you at the Solheim and oh my god wasn't it fantastic?...a man came over and he said to me were you at the Solheim Cup and I said I was and he gave me a big kiss on the cheek and said it was the most fantastic thing I watched, it was brilliant.

The nature of the Solheim Cup might indicate that this biennial sporadic investment from fans is cool and casual, they are also regarded as consumers and women are increasingly recognised by sports bodies and corporations as new consumer fans (Pope, 2010). The recognition of women fans as commodities is critiqued by Esmonde et al. (2015), where they discuss stereotypically conventional gendered marketing practices that infantilise (pink equipment), hyperfeminise and marginalize women and marks them as the 'other' in sport. Nonetheless, the merchandise tent at the event was a big discussion point for the fans. Abbie complained that the store closed early on one of the days and a number of fans including Elena complained that they sold out of stock. Isabelle, Lisa, Andrea, Nyla, Jasmine mentioned that the popular

woolly hats sold out, with Isabelle commenting “everybody wanted them, and they ran out on the very first day”.

Jasmine: What was really disappointing was the merchandise tent, basically was a bring and buy sale... basically a sale rail of crap...I still wear stuff that I bought at those kinds of events...there was literally nothing to buy...and it was sold out...we were lucky to buy woolly hats actually cause I think they'd sold out by 9 o'clock on Saturday.

Chuki: The merch tent ehm...wasn't big enough, women like to shop, I've never ever seen anybody having to queue to get into a merch tent at a golf event I've ever been to, ludicrous. Y'know I literally was overhearing conversations about I wanna spend money and I literally can't get in to spend it, that was ridiculous.

Ellie (as before, apologetically) mentioned that the alcohol stands could have been tailored to what she considered women's drinking tastes:

That sort of feel, as I say not so people should be completely wasted watching it but y'know, that is part of it, or unfortunately, not to be stereotypical, but y'know a prosecco stand or something where you could y'know, maybe more female specific type...stuff, there were coffee stands and things but there weren't many, and the queues were really, the queues were quite long every time you got to one.

Along with the availability of alcohol and toilets, the selling of apparel at the event concurs with findings from other studies on women fans, which show their priorities of consumerism and services at sporting events. However, it is the capital that results from their attendance at the event and their merchandise purchases along with the fans' networks and connections which serve to highlight distinction here.

## **Discussion**

This examination focused on how women fans who attended the Solheim Cup performed their fandom and the role negotiation and/or conflict associated with this conflict. It is important to note how the data is framed within the culture of golf and also during this unique biennial ‘flag-wearing’ Solheim Cup event. The sport environment has shaped a set of characteristics, performances and subjectivities of women fans that tell a unique story about their lived experience in golf. Similarly, their collective sharing of their experiences at a women’s golf event perhaps allowed them to speak freely and feel heard in a way that might dissipate in weekly tournament professional golf. Thus, the stories told, and voices heard here further emphasise the importance of acknowledging diversity of sports fan performance, male or female. Esmonde et al. (2015) argue that women fans are not exclusively included or excluded, but that inclusion and exclusion are shaped by contradiction. The ensuing paragraphs summarise the discourse of inclusions and exclusions that arose within the data, and detail what might be missing or go unnoticed through the performance of women sports fandom.

Some fan performances evidenced here were contested, particularly around elements of dress, drinking alcohol, shouting, banter with opposing fans and overall fan behaviour. Golf participants have had their dress regulated since the inception of golf, as are noise levels. Permission to shout and raise noise was mentioned, but the fans considered the noise and interactions as respectful (Kelly) and polite (Faye and Kelly). Fan knowledge was also contested, where some fans considered that others knew a lot, while others suggested there was a lack of knowledge. Some fans, particularly Cecile illustrated the dilemma in relation to ‘letting their hair down’, while all but one fan who complained about the availability of alcohol qualified their comments by saying that they didn’t intend on getting drunk anyway. This

evidence supports findings from research on women golfers, who have been shown to feel highly visible and under surveillance in golf settings (McGinnis et al. 2005; Mitchell et al. 2016). Earlier in the chapter the authors queried whether the unique setting of a women's sport event could allow for a shift in hegemonic fan relations; while sexism and misogynistic commentary were absent from this fan setting, this evidence suggests that hidden hegemony and surveillance continue to shape women's individual and group interactions in golf settings.

Previous research fans indicate how facilities, the event operation and the sports ground are important considerations for women fans, while the performances of fandom are dependent on the spatial location and its associated cultural norms and objects (McDonald et al. 2018; Richards et al. 2020; Richards and Parry 2020; Sveinson et al. 2019). This element of space was also relevant for the fans in this study, particularly in terms of the significance of the first tee, and the services including the toilet facilities, drink stations and the merchandise tent. While the weather was challenging for this particular event, something that went undiscussed in these interviews were the beauty and expansiveness of the event setting at Gleneagles as situated in the Scottish landscape; Bairner (2009) refers to how golf in Scotland is tied in with the nation and the landscape. This notion of taken-for-granted space, along with earlier mentioned aesthetic motivations of golf fans, and the distinctive fan behaviours all serve to emphasise the overall distinction associated with fans of sports like golf. As Bourdieu (1988, p.154) comments "everywhere golf creates distance: with regard to the nonparticipants' by the revered space, harmoniously arranged, where its practice takes place". In arguing for further research into female sports fandom, Pope (2017) advises clubs and governing bodies that when they introduce policies to address issues of gender inequality, they need to be sensitive to the diversity of women's experiences and how women are 'doing' fandom in a male dominated world.

While group affiliation was not considered an important motive for golf fans heretofore, the data here contradicts this, where friendship, connections and networks were central to fan performance and fan experiences at the Solheim event. Connections amongst the women golf fan community – whether planned and known or new and unknown – contributed to a jovial atmosphere between fans, no matter their team affiliation. The sense of care was also evident, with fans speaking on behalf of more vulnerable spectators, or others supporting mothers who brought their children. This evidence of inclusion amongst the fan community contradicts with the exclusivity that maybe associated with fans’ upstream connections, whereby fans alluded to their networks and connections to players, people and places with more power or status in golf.

Esmonde et al. (2015) speak about exclusions within sports fan communities, whereby if one is not of a similar race, class, age, or gender to the archetypal sports fan then accessing these communities is often a process of negotiating racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. Other than the toilets issue, women fans in this setting did not openly articulate exclusion at the event because of their gender, but there was evidence of other social exclusion or concealment of identities. The fan profile attending the event was described by Cym as “pretty diverse” and Lily who was a volunteer at the event mentioned “one day I spoke to 17 different nationalities”. Despite this, narratives of race, ethnicity and disability were absent from the fan interviews, and there was little evidence of intersectional moments, with all participants white, women and from the middle to higher social classes. Perhaps the comments above highlight what diversity actually looks like for this group of women fans. In terms of intergenerational aspects, younger fans (Ellie and Callie) were most conscious about coding their own dress at the event, and Callie (aged 22, the youngest fan by 13 years) mentioned the ‘dated’ music being played on the first tee. Unlike other research on women fans attending male sports, it appeared that acceptable femininity and sexualised identities were either downplayed or absent within this

fan environment. In speaking about why she follows women's golf, Judith commented that her motive wasn't related to player's femininities, saying: "it's not all 'fluffy' bunnies". While participants weren't asked about their sexuality, four fans indicated that they were gay or had same sex partners, but aside from Chuki who spoke openly, there was very little mention of this aspect of women fan identity within the discussions. Fans have been found to conceal their identities, while hierarchies exist in gender and sexuality among sports fans; identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other sexual identity is negatively associated with self-identified sports fandom (Allison and Knoester, 2020). Given recent research from football fans outlining dated attitudes towards race (Penfold and Cleland, 2022; Penfold and Kitchin, 2022), disability and women, the inclusions and exclusions recorded in the fan data presented here require deeper interrogation.

## **Conclusion**

Whilst the 2019 Solheim Cup provided such an opportunity for bringing a diverse group of fans together at the event, the continued existence of gendered behaviours and inequalities illustrated that this myth remains evident. The manner in which the women fans in this study spoke widely and openly about their experiences as women golf club members, the barriers, socialisation and overall gender politics indicates the layers of contestation, inclusion and exclusion present in their performance as fans. We contend that further research on women fandom is required to illustrate the nature of barriers to achieving gender equality for all fans.

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