Culture . . . is not a mental product: it is a lived practice formed by conscious human beings from their lived experience, and constituting for them a whole way of life . . . culture is both constituted by people consciously making choices and evaluations people have made in the past as tradition.¹

Official data show that about one in ten adult Australians play golf, making it one of the nation’s most popular participant sports. Physically, the game is equally suited to both men and women, but some 79% of players are men.² More significantly, the number of men who play golf has roughly doubled in Australia over the past twenty years whereas participation by women rose by a meagre 4%.³ Neither the “stick” of government equity initiatives, nor the “carrot” of various programs aimed at facilitating and encouraging women’s sports participation have made much impact on the gap. Golf, as sport, space, and spectacle, remains resolutely male.

Alison Dewar once defined sport as “a set of selected and selective social practices that embody meanings, values and practices that are implicated in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic social relationships.”⁴ This study is about sport as social practice. It is also about culture, sports culture, the subculture of golf, and about trying to fill gaps in present knowledge about how gendered power hierarchies in one particular sport have developed and been maintained over time. The study examines some of the processes and mechanisms through which the gender asymmetry in golf originated and was subsequently perpetuated. Particular attention is paid to two subjects. First, to the values and assumptions that underpin and validate the secondary and subordinate status of women in golf,

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especially so-called “organised” golf, that is, golf played within the club system. Second, the spotlight falls on the game’s myths and “traditions,” and how longstanding structures, systems, practices, and behaviours sustain existing class and gender power hierarchies.

**History/Herstory**

It is to [women’s] presence as spectators that the most serious objection must be taken. If they could abstain from talking while you are playing, and if the shadow of their dresses would not flicker on the putting-green while you are holing out, other objections might, perhaps, be waived. But, apart from these positive offences against the unwritten laws of golf, they unintentionally exercise an unsettling and therefore pernicious influence.5

A comprehensive history of women’s golf in Australia is yet to be written, although what Jennifer Hargreaves referred to as a “catalogue of difference” is as long as the history of the game itself.6 An attempt to integrate men’s and women’s golf into a single account of the sport’s history in one state was supposedly stymied by two things; first, the “two distinct paths” taken by ‘the administration and development of the game for men and women,” and second, “a lack of detailed information regarding women’s golf.”7 This lacuna is a serious and ongoing impediment to researchers. Individual club histories and other popular publications abound but offer little nourishment. Along with general accounts of golf’s development, these usually render women golfers invisible, subsumed into an all-encompassing male worldview of the game. Generally speaking, beyond mandatory chronicles of who won what when and obligatory accolades to long-serving officials or employees, scant attention is paid to women’s achievements.

Yet even the most pedestrian efforts serve some purpose. The silences are particularly telling whereas the fleeting, superficial, and often condescending attention customarily paid to women and women’s golf simultaneously reflects and reinforces widespread perceptions of women’s “place” within clubs as subordinate, secondary and/or social, and the lesser status of women’s golf as compared with men’s golf. Yet, if the history of golf is approached from another angle and with a different value perspective, there is a parallel herstory to complement the better-known history of golf.

Sport is, as Tatz reminds us, riddled with myths about the putative separation and differentiation of sporting activities, their culture, and their value systems from the social, recreational and cultural activities, and values of Australian society more generally.8 Myths they might be, but their effects are potent, persistent, close to ubiquitous, and, as Schell and Rodriguez have shown, particularly effective at maintaining masculine dominance in sport and sporting culture.9 As is common elsewhere, sport