

An endless race against sexism?

A critical thematic analysis of mediated gender discourse in Formula 1 in the wake of the #MeToo movement

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ABSTRACT

The year 2017 was marked by the global #MeToo movement and with it, a rise in the attention for feminist issues across various national contexts. Regarding Formula 1, a traditionally male-dominated sport, a newfound emphasis on gender inequality led to the launch of two exclusively female racing series in 2019 and 2023 respectively. Despite this rise in gender equality efforts and the fact that women have never been disadvantaged or banned from the sport by regulation, female drivers still struggle to obtain the same sponsoring and track- and testing time required to get signed by professional teams and sponsorships and build experience as men. A possible explanation for the continued issues women face in motorsport is the way they are perceived and how this is reflected in their position and treatment. Ever since the days of its conception, racing has been an elite club designed by and for men. Moreover, sports in general are a field especially affiliated with patriarchal norms and values due to their association with physical power and competition. Therefore, female athletes have historically been undervalued or excluded from these spaces altogether. Media have significant power to influence people's views and beliefs on notions such as gender by consistent reproduction of certain and exclusion of other perspectives. Indeed, trends of sexualization, trivialization, undermining, and underrating of female athletes have been explicated in the media. While scholars generally denote a positive trend in gender equality in sports and the framing of female athletes in media, racing seems to be lacking behind. With the #MeToo movement inspiring an increase in attention and efforts for feminist issues, it will be interesting to see if this is reflected in Formula 1's mediated gender discourse. As such, this thesis investigates how international sports and racing media reproduce or challenge hegemonic gender discourses in Formula 1 in the post-Me Too era. Specific focus is on the role prominent actors play in this mediated debate, as they are often used by media as credible sources, which gives them the power to shape the narratives and ideas that get reproduced and reinforced. Thematic analysis was conducted on 45 online news and opinion articles of five news and racing media, in which a critical feminist lens was adopted. It was concluded that media offer a space for debate in which conventionally hegemonic gender discourses are both actively challenged and reproduced. Media and quoted prominent actors both undermine female efforts by reinforcing patriarchal gender norms and stereotypes and advocate for increased female inclusion and fundamental restructuring towards gender equality. However, patterns of backlash against traditionally dominant gender ideas and practices suggest a shift in hegemony might be occurring. Finally, while traditionally excluded, women were included as credible sources in the articles. Despite this, however, prominent actors with varying ages, gender, and roles were used for credibility on both sides of the debate, both

reinforcing and challenging gender inequality in racing.

KEYWORDS: gender, discourse, formula 1, media, feminism

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1. Introduction

“This custom does not resonate with our brand values and clearly is at odds with modern day societal norms,” (*Formula 1 to stop using grid girls*, 2018, para. 3) reads the statement from Formula 1’s Managing Director of Commercial Operations at Formula 1, Sean Bratches, announcing the abolishment of Grid Girls in 2018. Grid Girls were attractive women working at Formula 1 races to promote sponsorships, hold umbrellas and boards displaying driver names, and line the path leading to the podium. After being a staple of the sport for decades, the timing of the custom’s abolishment is not arbitrary. The year 2017 was marked by the global #MeToo movement and with it, a rise in attention for feminist issues in various national contexts (Stone & Vogelstein, 2021). In Formula 1, a traditionally male-dominated sport, a newfound emphasis on gender inequality also led to the launch of two exclusively female racing series in 2019 and 2023 respectively, both of which aim to bridge the obstacles, discrimination, and exclusion female racers face (*Formula 1 announces F1 Academy*, 2022; *W Series*, 2023). Women struggle to obtain the same sponsoring and track- and testing time required to get signed and build experience as men (*Formula 1 announces F1 Academy*, 2022). In terms of formal regulations, however, women have never been prohibited from participating in motorsport (Matthews & Pike, 2016). The rules of racing never imposed a ban on female drivers, nor do its procedures explicitly favour men. Moreover, the W Series’ 2022 season was cancelled prematurely due to a lack of financial support and triple champion Jamie Chadwick has not obtained a contract or sufficient funding to compete in even the junior series (*W Series*, 2022; Bhattacharjee, 2022).

These facts indicate that there are other structural reasons for the consistent inequality women face in Formula 1. In the cited article about Grid Girls, it is suggested that positioning women in this stereotypical and subordinate role contributes to the problem. However, Formula 1 champion Sir Jackie Stewart challenged such claims (Delaney, 2018a). Specifically, Stewart denied gender inequality in racing altogether. Rather, he argued that a lack of female racers is due to the small number of girls getting into karting. The few women who are participating in racing simply lack the talent to make it to the higher disciplines. Teams would be “falling over themselves” (Delaney, 2018a, para. 8) if they found a woman good enough for Formula 1.

The Grid Girls debate is just one example of how media can create and encourage different narratives and ideas about notions such as gender. Indeed, scholars have established that media are crucial actors in defining femininity, gender roles, and gender practices (Carter & Steiner, 2004). They communicate specific ideologies and narratives, which might influence the norms and values of audiences. Consequently, media have the ability to reinforce or restrict the power of social groups through their mediated portrayal. Sports, especially, are portrayed in the media as reflections of patriarchal ideas (Trolan, 2013). Consequently, women have historically been treated and portrayed as abnormalities in this area and its media, leading to their marginalization (Matthews & Pike, 2016). As Formula 1 is commonly considered the pinnacle of motorsport, its media also influence the view of and opportunities for women in the lower gateway series (Hope, 2022). With growing backlash on

social media against sexism in racing (Hall, 2022) and an increasing amount of initiatives creating opportunities for female drivers (*Formula 1 announces F1 Academy*, 2022), it will be interesting to see if this is reflected in news and sports media, or if this is an area where women continue to be undermined.

Therefore, this thesis investigates how media may contribute to the reproduction of hegemonic discourses but also how they may be challenging hegemonic discourse about gender in Formula 1 in the post-Me Too era. To do so, a thematic qualitative analysis was conducted on online news and opinion articles of five international sports and racing media. In this process, a critical feminist lens was employed, supported by Glick and Fiske's (1996) "ambivalent sexism framework" and also drawing from existing academic work on mediated gender discourse in sports and racing (Howe, 2022; Antunovic & Whiteside, 2018). As each Formula 1 race receives significant media attention, prominent actors are often approached by the media to offer their expertise. In racing, examples of prominent actors are officials, drivers, and team bosses, of whom the vast majority is male (Southwell, 2021). Given their authoritative status, these actors have the power to affect sponsorships and contracts and can be especially influential on the way women are perceived and treated in racing. As such, their role in the mediated gender discourse debate is significant and specific attention is given to them in this thesis. Therefore, two inter-related research questions are addressed. First, how do international sports and racing media reproduce or challenge hegemonic gender discourses in Formula 1 in their online articles in the post-Me Too era? And second, how do prominent actors in Formula 1 contribute to this mediated debate?

Gender discourse refers to "ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about gender" (Hall, 1997, p.6). Dominant discourses are called hegemonic. They shape public opinion and understanding on a particular topic or issue and grant intellectual and moral leadership of a particular group over allied and subaltern groups (Gramsci, 1971). In this research, then, gender discourse refers to the narratives reproduced about women in racing, shaping the way women are perceived and treated in the sport. This includes, but is not limited to, perceptions of women's abilities, ideas about their roles in the sport, and reflections on gender inequality in racing.

Media are communication outlets that serve to (re)produce and challenge gender discourses. This research is limited to five international sports and racing media: Motosport.com, Sky Sports F1, F1i.com, GPFans, and RacingNews365. Of these media, 45 online news and opinion articles about women in racing were analysed.

Finally, the post-#MeToo era refers to the period after 2017, in which the #MeToo movement first garnered global attention. Originating in 2006, #MeToo is a social movement aiming to empower victims of sexual harassment and raise awareness about its prevalence (Burke, 2021). In 2017, the movement gained global momentum and attention when the hashtag "MeToo" went viral on social media. Centred around support, empathy, and accountability, victims are encouraged to speak up and share their stories (Hillstrom, 2018). Many did, including public figures, which further boosted the movement and led to the accusation and condemnation of numerous high-profile

individuals. Consequently, the #MeToo movement inspired both societal and legal change (Tippett, 2018). Many organisations changed their policies on sexual harassment and assault and patriarchal norms were challenged, promoting a culture of respect, consent, and equality instead.

In view of the above, on an academic level, this research is relevant because motorsport is an under-researched area in social sciences (Matthews & Pike, 2016). Furthermore, Howe (2022) suggests Formula 1 lags behind other sports in gender equality. Therefore, this thesis expands the academic field of motorsport, but also sheds light on gender discourses surrounding it. Finally, this study contributes to Media and Gender studies by furthering understanding of the role of media in shaping norms and values and advancing literature on gender, power relations, and social justice in sport (Kochanek et al., 2021). On a societal level, Formula 1 is among the largest sports nationally and globally (Ross et al., 2009). Consequently, norms and values embedded in and reproduced by the sport have the power to influence a global audience. As such, studying gender norms and practices Formula 1 normalizes matters for the continued struggle against misogynistic ideologies and practices embedded in all layers of society. Therefore, this study aims to increase societal awareness of the struggle and inequality women still face and hopes to inspire change.

This thesis consists of five chapters, with this introduction serving as the first. Chapter two provides an overview of previous research on gender discourse, the role of media in its reproduction, and women in motorsport and highlights the importance of considering gender as a constructed notion rather than a predetermined biological category. Chapter three discusses the theoretical lenses and methodological strategies employed in this research and reflects on the research process. Chapter four presents the results, displaying media as a space of discussion in which hegemonic gender ideologies are both reproduced and contended and places them in the context of previous research. And finally, chapter five answers the research questions and considers the implications and future research directions of the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces theories, concepts and, academic debate with regard to gender discourse, sports, and media that this study builds upon. Firstly, gender, discourse, and their interrelationship are conceptualised, after which the evolution of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourses is further analysed. Secondly, the history of racing is considered from the perspective of gender. Thirdly, the power of mainstream media as forces of gender discourse reproduction is considered, followed by a discussion of academic literature concerning how media have thus far represented women in sports and racing. Fourthly, the main theoretical lens utilised in the analysis, critical feminism, is explained. Finally, the conclusion identifies the gaps in the existent academic literature that the present study aims to fill.

2.1. Discourse and Gender: from hegemonic to counter-hegemonic gendered discourses and the role of the #MeToo movement

This section begins with a conceptualisation of discourse, gender, and how they interrelate before offering a deeper analysis of how hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses on gender relations have evolved. With the exception of bodily force, social power is primarily established indirectly by influencing people's values and beliefs (van Dijk, 1989). Controlling what people think is 'right' or 'true' allows for the reproduction of particular social practices and relations. Though established in varying ways, discourse plays a central role in this process (Lazar, 2007). Discourse refers to "ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic" (Hall, 1997, p.6). They manifest in written or verbal communication and encourage specific ways of talking about notions such as gender, but they also exclude alternative perspectives. As such, they work to create, define and reproduce constructs, concepts that derive their meaning from social consensus rather than objective reality (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). In this regard, hegemonic discourse refers to the dominant and pervasive set of ideas, beliefs, and values in a society that shapes public opinion and understanding on a particular topic or issue and grants intellectual and moral leadership of a particular group over allied and subaltern groups (Gramsci, 1971). Importantly hegemonic discourses and their underlying ideas, norms, and values can be challenged and disrupted by counter-discourses that seek to promote alternative perspectives. This proves to be difficult though, as those in power often have significant resources at their disposal to maintain their dominance (van Dijk, 1989).

Gender

In gender studies, one of the main debates centres around the very definition of "gender". On one side, essentialists argue gender contains specific innate, physiological characteristics that shape each man or woman in the same way (Hepburn, 2003). For example, advocates of this theory might argue (all) women are friendlier than (all) men because it is in the nature of their gender. In this sense, gender is a pre-determined, objective notion at the root of the observed differences between men and women. However, this view fails to consider that the characterizing features of men and

women vary over time and across different cultures (Bohan, 1993). Furthermore, with the wide diversity within a gender, essentialism necessarily marginalizes and excludes some men, women, or non-binary people by defining membership using properties that they do not have (Bohan, 1993).

On the other side of the debate, social constructionists argue that gender is a socially constructed category. While physical and physiological differences between men and women based on their biological sex are not denied, gender and its social consequences do not result naturally from these categories. Instead, it is argued that gender is actively created and agreed upon in social contexts. Gender categories serve as both a consequence and a justification for different social structures, while also legitimizing one of the most fundamental societal divisions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). From this perspective, women may be friendlier than men because social norms dictate this as an expectation for women but not for men. Such constructions are shaped by patriarchal ideologies on what it means to be feminine or masculine and how gender roles should be divided. Gender becomes a status imposed from early childhood that is continuously (re)produced through gender discourses defining gender identity, roles, and stereotypes (Butler, 2004). People perform gender by executing specific behaviours associated with a certain gender and adhering to gender stereotypes, which are preconceived notions and assumptions about what men and women should be like (Fenstermaker & West, 2013). Moreover, key to this perspective is the unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities between men and women perpetuated by gender ideology, discourses, and societal structures. However, a criticism social constructionism faces is its failure to consider if and when gender can be deconstructed and if all gendered interactions reinforce inequality (Deutsch, 2007). Finally, the relationship between biological sex and gender is complex and gender as a fixed, binary concept is increasingly challenged. Firstly, some people do not identify with the gender category assigned to them based on their biological sex. Secondly, rather than binary, it is progressively argued that gender is personal, multi-faceted, and fluid (Messerschmidt et al., 2018). Consequently, instead of a fixed, broad social category, gender is increasingly considered a personal expression of identity that is multi-faceted and subject to change.

In this thesis, a social constructionism perspective on gender is adopted, because it allows for the examination of how the female identity is constructed in Formula 1 media and gender inequality is reinforced accordingly. The next part considers discourse as a tool through which gender construction occurs.

Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourse

This study investigates hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourse in Formula 1's mediated debate which necessitates defining and adding nuance around both while also positioning them in a broader social and cultural context. To classify any written or verbal text as either, it is important to consider what each category entails. Undoubtedly, the dominant social system in most contemporary societies in the global north, which is the focus of this study, is patriarchy (Lockard, 2020). Patriarchy refers to "a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political,

social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women” (Nash, 2020, p. 43). In this system, feminine qualities are undervalued, while masculine qualities are privileged, restricting female economic and political participation and creating a hierarchy that ensures male dominance in both public and private spheres (Nash, 2020). Defenders of patriarchy utilise varying ideologies to justify the system. Inherent, biological differences between men and women that give men the natural right to social, political, and economic power are an example, but divine command is another (Lerner, 1986). Patriarchal ideas have shaped- and especially restricted- the role of women in society for centuries. Due to sports’ competitive nature and their association with physical skill, such ideas historically have been and still are especially present in this area (Trolan, 2013). Consequently, female athletes have been undervalued and disadvantaged in (professional) sports for years (Antunovic & Whiteside, 2018). This is especially true for Formula 1, as the sport lags behind others in its developments toward gender equality (Howe, 2022). As such, hegemonic gender discourses in Formula 1 are expected to be reflective of patriarchal norms and values.

However, such discourses can discursively manifest in different ways. Lazar (2007), for example, distinguishes between overtly expressed communications reflecting and reproducing gender ideology and texts with more implicit, nuanced meanings that nonetheless fulfil the same purpose. The ambivalent sexism framework developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) differentiates between hostile and benevolent sexism. Importantly, both forms reinforce traditional gender roles and preserve patriarchal social structures (Christopher, 2006). However, while hostile sexism refers to misogyny and is expressed through blatant negative evaluations of women, benevolent sexism refers to evaluations of women that seem unharmed but are incredibly damaging to gender equity and women’s personal, professional, political, and social opportunities. (Glick et al., 1997). Examples of the former include the belief that women are incompetent or too emotional. Examples of the latter include the romanticization of women as objects of heterosexual affection and the idea that women need to be protected by men (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The present study focuses on both explicit and implicit meanings of texts and employs the ambivalent sexism framework, which is appropriate because it offers a sense of patriarchal expressions and allows for a greater understanding of different gender ideologies and their reproduction.

Counter-hegemonic gender discourse is more difficult to conceptualize, as it essentially includes all discourses diverging from the dominant one. However, this is also the foundation of counterhegemony: it attempts to critique or dismantle hegemonic power and aims to motivate positive social or political change (Drezner, 2019). To gain a sense of the shape contemporary counter-hegemonic gender discourses might take, academic empirical studies on this subject are considered.

In their work on post feminism, Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) analyse post feminism discourse represented in the popular fiction series *Sex and the City*. Post feminism is a form of empowerment focusing on the individual rather than the collective. While sometimes criticised as

anti-feminist, its central focus is personal choice. Women can both challenge and reinforce traditional gender norms by adopting masculine and feminine traits and behaviours as they see fit. The key point is that it is their choice rather than imposed on them and their social, economic, and political power should not be restricted either way. Post feminist discourses are characterised by independence, individual choice, pleasure, consumer culture, hybridism, humour, and renewed focus on the female body (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). *Sex and the City* reflects these themes in varying ways. Firstly, women are allowed to have needs and desires and fulfil them freely, which includes sex. This challenges a patriarchal contradiction in which men are granted sexual freedom, while women are shamed for their sexuality. Secondly, the main female protagonists are strong and independent women with varying positions of power. This challenges stereotypical gender roles in which women are often expected to be stay-at-home mothers and subjugated to men. Thirdly, the series challenges patriarchal notions of femininity through humour and irony. For example, one of the protagonists jokes that the only thing she has ever made successfully in the kitchen is a mess, which deconstructs the stereotypical image of women as kitchen princesses. Finally, *Sex and the City* involves androgynous and gender bending characters. This means characters have complex identities and exhibit a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine traits (MacDonald, 1995). This challenges gender as binary, fixed categories with predetermined traits and roles.

Another study by Sheik et al. (2019) investigates gender discourses through analysis of the portrayal of heroines in Marvel and DC Comics' blockbuster movies. They establish a recent shift from gender representation and discourse reproducing patriarchal gender discourses to challenging those dominant ideas and structures. Traditionally, blockbusters centred around male saviours, emphasising their physical power, and intellectual superiority. Female characters were scarce and often portrayed as emotional and vulnerable. Furthermore, they were highly sexualised in comparison to their male counterparts and depicted in subordinate roles. All of this reinforces patriarchal ideas of male superiority and the division of gender roles. However, the authors depict a shift in the portrayal of women in blockbusters. Female characters are more frequently portrayed as strong, competent leaders. Simultaneously, hegemonic masculinity was challenged as well: previously strong, steadfast male characters are portrayed as subordinate, uncertain, and in need of help. Similarly, male characters are increasingly depicted in caring, parental roles, challenging patriarchal gender stereotypes in which this is typically reserved for women. Moreover, an increased focus on and development of female relationships was observed. Finally, a persistent narrative was denoted where female characters go through a phase of self-discovery that allows them to unleash their true potential. This shows another pattern of female empowerment. In sum, counter-hegemonic gender discourses in Marvel and DC blockbusters primarily manifest in the form of discursive empowerment of women. Similarly to what Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) argue, an important part of this is challenging conventional gender stereotypes, traits, and roles. Women are depicted as autonomous, strong equals to men, challenging the patriarchal status quo that restricts them to lower economic, social, and political status.

The shift in gender discourse denoted by Sheik et al. (2019) did not occur arbitrarily. Rather, they argue it is a direct effect of the 2018 #MeToo movement. Indeed, the #MeToo movement has played a significant role in shaping contemporary counter-hegemonic gender discourses. The movement primarily encourages conversation about the prevalence of sexual assault and (mis)treatment of women in professional spaces, as well as advocates for the empowerment of victims and the establishment of a culture of respect, consent, and equality (Burke, 2021). However, global participation and attention for the social movement incited a broader focus on persisting gender inequality issues and challenging hegemonic gender norms and ideologies, especially in the global north (Tippett, 2018). Broadly speaking, the #MeToo movement worked to increase and normalise discourses on gender equality, female empowerment, and persistent sexism and mistreatment of women in personal, professional, and social spheres.

In conclusion, contemporary counter-hegemonic gender discourses are characterised by advocacy for gender equality, female empowerment, and opposition against patriarchal gender norms and ideas. Moreover, it calls for attention for prevalent sexism and mistreatment of women. Key themes are female autonomy and independence, redefining and deconstructing gender traits, stereotypes, and roles, and economic, social, and political equality. The sport of racing is one example that male dominance is sustained both on structural inequalities and hegemonic discourses about femininity and masculinity. Therefore, the next part discusses the history of racing from the perspective of gender.

2.2. Women in Racing: a historical appraisal of invisibility and gendered discourses and the introduction of W-series

Existing literature on women in motorsport is limited, yet rich. Except for Matthews and Pike (2016), who outline a brief golden age for women during the 1930s, there seems to be a consensus that women are and always have been undervalued in racing (Howe, 2022; Kochanek et al., 2021). Consequently, the causes of the inequality between men and women in racing are the centre of academic discussion. In this section, some of the key findings and debates in this area of research are discussed through a selection of case studies.

Gendering of bodies

Pflugfelder (2009) analyses the gendering of bodies in motor racing. His work poses a critique to common convictions depicting motorsport as an egalitarian discipline where gender is irrelevant. While racing centres around technology and machines, neutralizing physical differences between racers, this does not mean motorsport is egalitarian. Rather, women encounter various challenges in their attempts to obtain success in the male-dominated fields of motorsport. These include persistent scepticism about their driving ability, experiences of being marginalized in a homogeneous sport, restricted and stereotyped notions of femininity, both positive and negative impacts of conforming to feminine presentation, and being seen as symbolic disruptions in the

driver-car dynamic. As Pflugfelder (2009) argues, outside forces like the media and fans, inspired by common sense ideology of mass culture (Sloop, 2015), depict women in racing as different, stereotypically feminine, and intimidating. Specifically, women's bodies are portrayed as different in three spheres: beyond vehicles, with vehicles, and inside vehicles.

Pflugfelder articulates an eloquent critique of the idea that motor racing is an egalitarian, genderless sport. Even if hidden by their helmets when in the car, women are unable to shed their female identity imposed on them by society. Because motorsport has been male-dominated since its conception, physical and mental characteristics typically considered masculine became synonymous with the sport's defining features. As long as these ideas persist in and beyond motorsports, female drivers will be discriminated against because of their gender.

Gender inequality: historical trends of female racers and media representation

Like Pflugfelder, Matthews and Pike (2016) argue that the central factor contributing to women's inequality in racing is the portrayal of women by forces like the media. Based on documentary analysis of 125 articles published between 1890-1985 and 1999 and 2010, they argue that women's current position in racing is part of a consistent trend of (media) marginalisation and trivialization originating in the very invention of the car. Because men traditionally manufactured cars and driving was associated with speed and bravery, racing became a sport for and by men. Women were considered unfit drivers by nature and the racing world in general was a prestigious men's club, which was continuously reiterated by the media. World War I saw a brief golden age for women in racing when the absence of husbands forced women to take over activities typically considered masculine. Consequently, discourses on female drivers started to change. This change was short-lived, however. With the need for re-population and re-building of the nation after World War II, women were again excluded from racing based on biological arguments deeming them too frail for racing. This was further stimulated by the increasing professionalization and commercialization of motorsport, which only worked to make motorsports even more of an elite men's club. All of this resulted in a lack of representation that continues to discourage female participation in racing today.

A common theme throughout the research is the apparent dominance of patriarchal discourse. The degree to which women are allowed to participate in racing highly depends on public opinion on the matter. Despite scientific proof, technological advancements making driving less physically demanding, and women's achievements in racing, men were able to limit female participation in motorsport throughout history by reinforcing ideas that women are biologically unfit for driving. Furthermore, particularly interesting is that while Matthews and Pike's (2016) depict a 'tomboy' stereotype in motorsport, Pflugfelder's (2009) argues that women in motorsports emphasise their femininity to appear less threatening. However, the accounts of female drivers themselves in this regard seem to be rather diverse (Matthews & Pike, 2016), so both claims likely have some truth to them, but neither is generalisable as a universal experience for women in racing.

A great advantage of this particular research is that it lays bare the progression of attitudes towards women in racing in both media and society over time. However, due to the long period under study, the analysis of particular periods is less in-depth than an analysis of articles of the same year could have been. Furthermore, the study focuses on a single news outlet, further restricting the research from possible counter-views.

Additional entry barriers

Finally, Howe (2022) combines previous arguments in her cultural examination of women in Formula 1. Similarly to Pflugfelder (2009) and Matthews and Pike (2016), she depicts historical and current attitudes, sexualisation, and lack of visibility and representation, as four of the main barriers responsible for the struggle women face in motorsport. However, she diverges from Pflugfelder's (2009) argument that gendered bodies are only accounted for in the discourse of the sport, and not its physical conditions. Rather, she argues, it is both. With the creation of exclusively-female racing discipline W Series, racing loses its self-proclaimed genderless nature. The W Series genders the female body both within and beyond the vehicle and reinforces the idea that female drivers are inherently different or inferior to their male counterparts. In the debate on whether female drivers minimise or emphasise their femininity, Howe (2022) argues it is a challenging dilemma. On one hand, sexualising themselves could help women obtain the monetary support. This, however, puts them at risk of being characterised as sexual objects first and foremost, trivialising their careers as racers. On the other hand, avoiding heteronormative conformity puts them at risk of being marginalised. Finally, Howe (2022) identifies a fifth barrier: money. She argues obtaining the required money to compete in racing is harder for women.

Interestingly, Howe (2022) does not focus extensively on the role of media nor does she place media at the centre of gender inequality in racing like other scholars. Her research broadens the scope and offers an elaborate overview of the varying struggles female drivers face in motorsport. However, while Howe (2022) is relatively optimistic about the W Series and its influence on the position of women in racing, one should still be sceptical and critical. The W Series was launched in 2019 to help women progress to the upper echelons of motorsport (W Series, n.d.). It is an exclusively female racing series where eighteen competitors are selected by a council of motorsport professionals based on their racing abilities. Contrary to other racing disciplines, W Series does not require the drivers to bring in financial backing of their own to be eligible for participation. Moreover, all competitors drive mechanically identical cars, which ensures that the most talented driver wins, rather than the one with the best developed car or highest level of monetary support (W Series, n.d.). The racing discipline features alongside Formula 1 at eight Grand Prix weekends, is broadcasted by various big motorsport channels, and offers its winner a considerable cash prize. As such, W Series was created to offer female drivers more visibility, give them opportunities to develop their skill, and help them obtain the monetary funding required in the higher levels of racing (W Series, n.d.).

However, one critique the W Series faces is that it promotes female segregation rather than inclusion (Richards, 2019). Separating them from their male competitors risks reinforcing ideas that women are not good enough to progress in competition with men. Why not create more opportunities and monetary funding for female drivers in the existing racing series and talent programs where they race alongside men? Furthermore, there are currently no female drivers active in the higher levels of motorsport. Regardless whether this is due to a lack of talent or structural barriers withholding female drivers from developing that talent, it means the W Series grid consists of drivers who do not have many accomplishments or good reputations in the sport as of yet. Consequently, it is questionable whether winning the W Series championship will help the winner's credibility and chances to progress to higher levels of racing (Mitchell, 2018). Unfortunately, this is exemplified by Jamie Chadwick, who has dominated all three W Series championships, but has not been able to get a seat in Formula 2 or even Formula 3 (White, 2022). Therefore, it is good to remain critical and question whether- despite good intentions- initiatives like the W Series hurt or help female drivers. Again, I would argue for more opportunities and support for female drivers in traditional talent programs and racing series.

Evidently, gender ideology and media are common themes in academic debate about women's position in motorsport. Therefore, the next section considers the relation between gender ideology and discourse and media more elaborately.

2.3. Media, Sports and Women: gendered bodies

This part starts with a general discussion of why mainstream media, online or offline, remain important in the legitimization of hegemonic discourses and then discusses literature in relation to how media have thus far represented women in sports and racing.

Media play a significant role in legitimizing certain discourses over others as modern technologies allow for discourses to be (re)produced continuously and globally. The relationship between media and gender has long received academic attention from various perspectives. Prominent examples of this are Social Cognitive Theory from the field of psychology, Cultivation Theory commonly used in sociology and communications studies about the lasting effects of media, and Feminist Theory. The main difference between these is their starting points: Social Cognitive Theory suggests individuals learn and model behaviour by observing and imitating others and, therefore, copy the models of behaviour they perceive in the media (Pajares et al., 2009). Cultivation Theory, on the other hand, proposes that repeated exposure to media shapes individuals' perceptions of reality (Busselle & Van den Bulck, 2019). Finally, Feminist Theory emphasizes social, political, and economic equality of the sexes and how media can play a powerful role in perpetuating gender inequality by promoting gender stereotypes, objectification, and marginalization of women (Lazar, 2007). However, albeit through varying ways of reasoning, each school of thought reaches the same conclusion: media have the ability to shape individuals' attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and identities. Indeed, media have become one of the most powerful forms of socialization generating

discourse (Perderson, 2002). In their content, media glorify ‘traditional’ womanhood and gender inequality, restrict women to domestic settings and subjugated roles, and objectify them as sex objects for men (Mendes & Carter, 2008). In this manner, patriarchal ideas are reproduced and normalized and male dominance is reinforced.

Another key point in gender and media studies is the unequal accessibility of media, both in terms of its production and consumption. Although technological developments facilitate global spread of media content, not everyone has access to the same content. This is due to availability of the required technology, but also other issues like distribution rights and censorship (Xu & Albert, 2014). Moreover, only a select few are granted the power to contribute to media content production (van Dijk, 2013). In news media in particular, journalists depend on what Hall (1978) dubs ‘primary definers’: credible individuals or institutions granted media access to facilitate their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within their area of competence. Media depend on them to maintain neutrality and authority, but their consistent inclusion also means the exclusion of other narratives (Harjuniemi, 2021). The media themselves become secondary definers reproducing the definitions, narratives, and ideology of those with privileged access to media (Hall, 1978). Therefore, researching gender discourse in Formula 1 is not just a question of what is said, but also who gets a say in the first place. With the majority of its prominent actors being male since its conception (Southwell, 2021), this could be one of the reasons for the sport’s prevalent gender inequality.

As a result of limited access to media production, discourse definition and reproduction essentially becomes an oligopolistic affair, or even monopolistic in countries where media are under state control. Hegemonic ideology, norms, and values are continuously reinforced, while alternative perspectives are denied a narrative at all. This is one of the main reasons why it is difficult to challenge the hegemony of those in as they still control the main medium of information (van Dijk, 1989). Initially, there was optimism about the internet as an objective space where the disempowered could have a voice and contest hegemonic power through cyberactivism. However, it has since been concluded that computer networks and traffic are not immune from their social and political roots and cyberactivism is not sufficient to empower minorities (Warf & Grimes, 1997), whereas research has also shown cases of online misogyny and toxic masculinity. For example, a study of Drakett et al. (2018) shows a trend of normalisation and justification of (online) misogyny through the use of humour and memes. Consequently, traditional and social media continue to be powerful forces of socialization shaping gender discourse rather than objective spaces.

Media representation of female athletes specifically has long been a subject of academic interest in gender, sports, and media studies. The way media portray female athletes matters, as it can affect public opinion on sportswomen, consequently influencing the sponsorships, opportunities, recognition, and visibility they receive (Trolan, 2013). Academic literature on sports and media reveals that female athletes have historically been under-represented, trivialized, and excluded by media in the male dominated world of sports (Bernstein, 2002). The 1960s and 1970s saw significant legal, political, and cultural changes for female athletes as a result of the period’s women’s

movement (Antunovic & Whiteside, 2018). Women were offered more sports-related scholarships, professional opportunities, and access to international competitions (Acosta, & Carpenter, 2012). However, sports media did not progress similarly. Women remained mere afterthoughts or were excluded from sports media coverage altogether (Cooky et al., 2015). These low levels of media exposure and representation caused limited investment and sponsorship for women's sports and its athletes, creating a vicious cycle of invisibility, lack of investment, and dearth of female athletes.

Another persistent issue for female athletes denoted by scholars centres around language and framing when media did cover female sporting events and competitors. Specific themes were reoccurring in media coverage of female sports and athletes and these were especially notable compared to the type of coverage of male competitions and athletes. Firstly, female athletes were consistently sexualised, with media portrayals focusing on their bodies, physical beauty, and personal lives instead of their athletic skills and performance (Kane et al., 2013). Secondly, the language used in reports on men and women's sports differed greatly. For male athletes, the language used emphasised their physical proficiency, aggression, and power. Meanwhile, reports on female athletes focused on emotion, beauty, and grace (Messner et al., 1993). Such different framing undermines female athletes by reinforcing patriarchal and sexist gender stereotypes that women are inherently inferior to men and that their physical attractiveness matters more than their skills and achievements as sportswomen.

Both trends of media invisibility and stereotypical framing are particularly prevalent in motorsport, though academic literature on female representation in racing is limited. While sports are generally a male dominated area where patriarchal ideas are especially prominent due to their association with physical abilities and competition, this is even more true for racing. Beyond bodily strength, racing involves a high level of mechanics and technology, both traditionally male dominated areas (Matthews & Pike, 2016). Consequently, women were excluded from media coverage to a high degree and sexualisation and reproduction of gender stereotypes common. If included at all, women were depicted in racing media as bad drivers, biologically too weak to cope with the physical demands of driving such fast cars, and mentally unable to handle the competition (Matthews & Pike, 2016; Pflugfelder, 2009). At the same time, more media attention was dedicated to the bodies, beauty, and personal lives of female drivers and other women in the paddock, further encouraging gender stereotypical beliefs (Kochanek et al., 2021). Not only are these types of media portrayal (or lack thereof) particularly prominent in racing, but they are also especially harmful to the position and prospects of female drivers, because the sport's expensive nature makes drivers even more depended on sponsorships and external funding.

Today, there has been a significant improvement in the visibility of female athletes in sports media, particularly when it comes to major events (Bernstein, 2002). Scholars denote a substantial increase in support and advocacy for female athletes among fans, male athletes and sporting institutions fighting for their visibility and representation (Antunovic & Whiteside, 2018). Recent research also suggest some improvements in the type of coverage as well, with framing differences

between the coverage of male and female sports decreasing and newfound appreciation for sportswomen's skills and achievements. However, media representation of women in sports still has a long way to go before true gender equality is reached. Despite the aforementioned improvements, women's sporting achievements are still commonly undermined and the female athletes themselves infantilized and stereotyped (Hovden, & von der Lippe, 2020). This is especially true for motorsport, which scholars argue continues to lack behind other sports when it comes to gender equality (Howe, 2022). The persistence of stereotyped framing, undermining, and underrating of female athletes in racing and sports media reiterates the idea that sport is at its core a male activity and women play only a secondary or sexualized role. Furthermore, it reinforces the patriarchal ideas and structures sports are associated with and affects women's position not only in sports, but society at large (Trolan, 2013).

2.4. The study's approach: Critical Feminism and discourse

This final section of the second chapter introduces the main theoretical frameworks guiding the study and explains the five key principles of a Feminist Critical Discourse approach.

This research draws on Social Constructionism and Feminist Theory, specifically Lazar's (2007) Feminist Critical Discourse (FCD) framework. This approach denaturalizes gender ideology, attempting to show how "frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). As such, the framework acknowledges the material and phenomenological consequences the issues dealt with have for certain groups. FCD approaches texts with five key principles which are discussed below.

Firstly, FCD does not simply seek to expose existing power relations sustaining oppressive social structures. Rather, by raising critical awareness through research and teaching, the ultimate goal is to challenge the status quo and motivate social change (Grant, 1993). As such, FCD research is considered an analytical form of activism.

Secondly, from a feminist perspective, gender is considered an ideological structure that divides people into two classes: men and women. This division grants men domination while forcing women into a role of subordination and it imposes a social dichotomy of labour and traits on men and women (Lazar, 2005). Though often appearing to be consensual, these disparate power relations are principally accomplished through discursive means presenting them as common-sensical and natural (Gramsci, 1971). Furthermore, FCD recognizes that patriarchal gender ideology is not just an individual belief, but rather a system that is established and perpetuated through the institutions and social practices of a society (Lazar, 2007). Finally, although the predominant gender ideology is hegemonic and continuously re-established through social institutions and practices, it is also contestable.

Thirdly, FCD recognizes that the operation of power relations materializes in different forms across time and cultures. Traditional, overt forms include exclusionary social practices, physical

violence, and sexual harassment and denigration of women. In many societies today, however, a seemingly innocuous form of power that is predominantly discursive in nature prevails (Lazar, 2007). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that gender is not a detached notion. Rather, it intersects with race, social class, and sexual orientation (Cooper, 2015). As such, gender is neither experienced nor discursively enacted homogeneously for women everywhere. Therefore, FCD adopts a perspective that contextualizes women's complex social identities and is implicitly comparative rather than universalizing.

Fourthly, FCD considers discourse one of several aspects of social practices and focuses specifically on elements that are discursive in nature and which are reflective of particular ideologies (Chouliariaki & Fairclough, 1999). Discourse simultaneously constitutes and is constituted by social situations, institutions, and structures (Fairclough, 1992). As such, gender discourse is an active producer of gender identities, rather than a reflection of 'natural', pre-existent notions of what it means to be a man or woman (West et al., 1997). FCD focuses particularly on the dynamics between different forms of masculinity and gender discourse constructing femininity vis-à-vis masculinity (Lazar, 2007). Beyond overtly expressed meaning, it also considers implicit meanings in communication responsible for the reproduction of power relations. The level of analysis is broad, including choices in lexis, clauses/sentences/utterances, conversational turns, structures of argument and genre, and interactions among discourses.

Finally, reflexivity refers to the inclination of people in late modern societies to use their knowledge about social processes and practices to shape their own social practices (Giddens, 1991). FCD maintains reflexivity in two ways. Firstly, it focuses on how reflexivity occurs in institutional practices, with suggestions for prospects for change in the social and personal attitudes and practices of individuals. Secondly, it is encouraged to engage in continuous critical self-reflection (Lazar, 2007).

Drawing on the FCD framework is appropriate because it combines varying theories relevant to the study, such as Feminism and Constructionism. Furthermore, it combines a critical analysis of language in relation to its societal context with fundamental developments in critical feminist theory (Nartey, 2021). As such, it lays bare patriarchal ideas embedded in texts and allows for analysis of discursive strategies of oppression, resistance, and empowerment of women in Formula 1.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have defined gender and discourse, considered their interrelationship, and offered a deeper analysis of the development of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourse. In this study, a Social Constructionist approach to gender is adopted, which means gender is a socially constructed notion that serves as both a consequence and a justification for different social structures. Hegemonic gender discourses generally reproduce a patriarchal gender ideology in which women are economically, socially, and politically inferior to men. Counter-hegemonic gender discourses, on the other hand, challenge these traditional gender norms and roles and fight for gender

equality and female empowerment.

Media are powerful tools of (gender) discourse reproduction and a review of literature on mediated gender discourse in sports media revealed that female athletes and drivers have been consistently sexualised, undermined, stereotyped, and underrepresented by media. Such trends reinforce patriarchal norms and values and are harmful to female athletes' prospects, opportunities, and reputations. Despite progress, patterns of exclusion, stereotyping, and underrating persist in sports media and are particularly prominent in racing.

In the academic debate on women's position in motorsport, gender ideology, discourse, media, and their interrelationship are common themes. However, research analysing contemporary gender ideologies and discourse related to racing in media is lacking. Moreover, few studies focus on Formula 1 specifically, despite the series being considered the 'pinnacle of motorsport', its global reach and media coverage, and its influence on other racing series (Hope, 2022). Furthermore, while generally theorizing a positive future for women in racing, existing research has not yet considered gender discourse in racing and its possible development following the #MeToo movement in 2017. Therefore, the present research aims to fill these gaps.

Finally, I have explained critical feminism as the primary analytical lens for this study, because it combines varying relevant gender and media theories and lays bare both explicit and implicit ideological gender expressions reinforcing disparate power structures.

3. Methods – Research Design & Operationalisation

In this chapter, the methodological strategies to conduct this study are discussed. Firstly, the type of analysis and theoretical lenses through which the study is approached are explained and justified. Secondly, the sampling strategy is elaborated. Thirdly, the research's main concepts are operationalized drawing from relevant literature through the integration of varying theoretical frameworks. Finally, possible methodological limitations are recognized and defended.

3.1. Methodology and method of analysis

To investigate how media reproduce or challenge hegemonic gender discourses in Formula 1, qualitative analysis was conducted. Qualitative analysis is the most appropriate method as it seeks to explore and systematically describe the meaning of phenomena in qualitative data beyond manifest meanings (Brennen, 2021; Schreier, 2014). Using qualitative analysis, then, allows for an in-depth and critical examination of the gender-related discourses in sports media in line with the research question.

Of the qualitative methods, thematic analysis was selected. This allows for the identification and interpretation of patterns in texts, which enables the establishment and critical assessment of patterns related to gender discourse (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Moreover, thematic analysis moves beyond explicit and identifies and examines “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This makes thematic analysis suitable, as it aids to acquire insight into gender ideologies underlying gender discourses shaping the view on and position of women in media about Formula 1. Finally, thematic analysis is appropriate, because it is not tied to a particular theoretical perspective (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This allows for the adoption of a critical feminist lens, drawing on a Feminist Critical Discourse framework (Lazar, 2007), and the ambivalent Sexism framework (Glick & Fiske, 2001). As Braun and Clarke (2021) note, when thematic analysis is implemented within a critical qualitative theoretical framework- in the case of this study critical feminism that draws upon other qualitative frameworks like constructionism- it allows for investigation akin to pattern-based discursive approaches, like critical discourse analysis. Rather than the micro details of language practice, the superseding focus of such approaches is on macro patterns of meaning in data. Gender discourse is an example of macro patterns of meaning, which makes this critical thematic analysis approach particularly suitable for the present study. The aforementioned theoretical lenses are furthermore valuable for the present research for two main reasons. The former combines a critical analysis of language in relation to its societal context with fundamental developments in critical feminist theory. The latter allows for a greater understanding of different gender ideologies, their reproduction, and how they can affect women in society or specific communities.

3.2. Sample

This study examines news and opinion articles of international sports and racing media discussing women in racing and especially Formula 1. Online articles were selected for research rather than TV or radio news data, as online articles are freely accessible. Moreover, they are often posted on the media's social channels as well, which allows them to reach a larger and international audience. Furthermore, digital news media have surpassed traditional news media in both engagement and interactivity and this is also the dominant media type in the highly digitized world of Formula 1 (Brid.TV, 2021). Finally, online news and opinion articles in Formula 1 are produced and published at a high rate and conveniently preserved in online repertoires. This enables a more complete, cohesive database.

Then, to select specific online media, the following criteria were set: relative status, relevance, and popularity in Formula 1 and among the sport's English-speaking fans. Status was determined based on the media's presence in the Formula 1 paddock and Media Council and access to prominent actors for interviews. For popularity, the media's average number of monthly readers and their relative position on search engine results were considered. Relevance was based on whether the media's content aligned with the purposes of this study. Articles of the major media are most likely to have the greatest reach- including among those with the power to affect funding and contracts- and be granted a certain intellectual authority on racing-related matters. They are, therefore, most likely to be able to contribute to the debate and view on women in racing. This, in turn, affects the opportunities women are offered. Furthermore, the media were required to have considerable repositories of their articles available and be currently active. Finally, only media with freely accessible articles were selected, as this not only facilitates this research but also allows for greater reach to audiences.

In view of the above, the following five media were selected through purposive sampling: Motorsport.com, Sky Sports F1, F1i.com, GPFans, and RacingNews365. In total, three are media specialized on Formula 1, one is a larger motorsport media, and one concerns a news media with a separate sports section. From the news or motorsport media like Sky and Motorsport.com, the focus was on their Formula 1 subsection. Next, the following section offers an overview of the selected media and the rationale for including them in this study.

Motorsport.com

The first media selected for this research is Motorsport.com, an international digital media group specializing in motor racing content. It offers 22 editions in 15 languages and is globally the largest database of motorsport images, the biggest motorsports video and news article library, and the leader for online motorsport news content (*About us*, n.d.). Motorsport.com covers a range of racing series and has a separate Formula 1 sub-section. Motorsport.com is part of the Motorsport Network company, an American media and technology company with headquarters in Miami and London (*About*, n.d.). It operates in international digital, videogame, print, and e-commerce businesses. Since their creation, both Motorsport.com and the Motorsport Network have obtained numerous

acquisitions and partnerships, for example with Puma Company (*Motorsport.com and Leading F1 Merchandiser*, 2016). Although independent and without explicitly expressed political affiliation, the medium has partnered with Formula 1 team Ferrari in the past and current McLaren-F1 team boss Zak Brown was its non-executive chairman from 2016-2019 (*Ferrari Names Motorsport.com*, 2015; *Motorsport.com Appoints Zak Brown*, 2016). Furthermore, double Formula 1 champion Fernando Alonso became a shareholder of the mother company in 2019 (*Fernando Alonso invests in Motorsport*, 2019). Although their connection to the medium does not inherently affect the medium's stance on women in racing, it is worth noting both Ferrari and McLaren are making efforts to increase female inclusion in their teams.

Motorsport.com has an extensive database and library. Furthermore, readers are not required to have a subscription to access the articles, which allows for the content to reach a larger audience. Additionally, Motorsport.com is among the most popular and prominent motorsport media, with their F1 editor, Jonathan Noble, having a seat on the FIA's Media Council (*Author Jonathan Noble*, n.d.). Consequently, it is a medium with relatively high influence on the mediated discourses around Formula 1 with access to prominent actors.

Sky Sports F1

The second medium included in this research is Sky Sports (F1), the online platform of Sky TV. In 2012, the Sky Sports F1 television channel was exclusively launched to broadcast Sky's UK and Ireland coverage of Formula 1 (*F1*, n.d.). Sky Sports F1 offers extensive programming of motor racing's top discipline, including a weekly magazine show, a segment with historic F1 content, and a topic show presented by Formula 1 personality Ted Kravitz (*F1*, n.d.). Within these programs, Sky Sports representatives frequently interview Formula 1 drivers, team bosses, and other involved parties. Furthermore, the medium has several former Formula 1 drivers as presenters and commentators, such as 2009 champion Jenson Button and 2016 champion Nico Rosberg. Both are relatively adamant advocates for women in racing (Morlidge, 2018; Rosberg, 2022), which possibly affects the discourses on women reproduced by Sky Sports F1. On the online platform, Sky Sports offers varying content ranging from videos and news articles to gossip (*F1*, n.d.). While Sky Sports (F1) does not express a clear political affiliation, mother company Sky's news channel is considered neutral or leaning more towards conservative (*Is Sky News*, n.d.), which might give shape to a more traditional gender ideology within the content of related institutions making it an interesting addition to the study.

Sky Sports F1 gives access and visibility to prominent actors in Formula 1 and employs or collaborates with some of them. This facilitates finding articles where prominent actors are included in line with the research aims. Furthermore, Sky Sports F1's articles are easily accessible, despite the tv channel being exclusive to the UK and Ireland. Finally, it is a prominent and popular medium in Formula 1, with some of its segments like Ted's Notebook especially popular in the Formula 1 fan community (*Sky Sports*, 2022). This makes Sky Sports F1 a medium with relatively significant

influence on the mediated discourses in Formula 1.

F1i.com

The third medium of which articles were gathered is F1i.com. Based in the UK, F1i.com is a news blog specifically centred around Formula 1. The site is separated into different sections: F1 news, reports, features, technical, and pictures direct from the paddock (*Home*, n.d.a). One of the site's main journalists, Philip van Osten belongs to the top journalists and publishers covering Formula 1 (*Best Formula One Journalists*, 2023.). Van Osten specializes in providing a historic or business perspective on Formula 1's affairs. There are no expressed political affiliations associated with F1i.com. Despite being a smaller medium, it is quite popular among both Formula 1 actors and their fans (Feedly.com, n.d.). For example, the blog's social media accounts are followed by multiple Formula 1 drivers.

Furthermore, given its popularity and reach, F1i.com is a significant Formula 1 medium and its mediated discourse is able to reach not just the sport's global audience, but the athletes and other people involved as well. Finally, its extensive archive, lack of subscription requirement, and user-friendly searching feature added to its suitability for this research.

GPFans

The fourth medium is GPFans, a brand with multiple platforms that offers its content in several languages and is dedicated specifically to Formula 1 coverage. Its content focuses especially on the future of Formula 1 under Liberty Media and the drivers both on and off the track (*Our Team*, n.d.). On the brand's online platform, a variety of sections can be found, ranging from F1 news, to live standings, and tickets sale. GPFans originates from the UK but is accessible globally. With 16.2 million visits per month, the medium is rather popular in the sphere of Formula 1.

GPFans offers a variety of content, is a relevant source in the world of Formula 1, and has a wide reach among Formula 1's audiences. Furthermore, the website is easily accessible without a subscription, as are the articles. All of this ensures the availability of relevant sources that are able to contribute to the debate on the position of women in Formula 1.

RacingNews365

The fifth medium is RacingNews365, which provides racing enthusiasts daily with the latest news of Formula 1 as well as several other motorsport disciplines (*Home*, n.d.b). In addition to first-hand reports of Formula 1 races, readers can find exclusive content, interviews, and background information. In the Netherlands, RacingNews365 is the largest Formula website and it has won several prizes in the country, including five consecutive Website of the Year awards (*Editorial team and staff*, n.d.). Editorial director Dieter Rencken is one of the few independent journalists regularly covering the full Formula 1 season and has experience in motorsport as an engineer, manager, and journalist. Engagement with the global site is steadily increasing, with 3.4 million people visiting the

site in April 2023 (*Editorial team and staff*, n.d.).

RacingNews365 offers extensive Formula 1 content. Furthermore, its articles are easily accessible and are archived online for years. With its prominent position among Formula 1-related websites and on-site reporting, RacingNews365 has access to prominent Formula 1 actors for their interviews and is able to contribute to gender discourses in the sport.

Naturally, these are a select few among a wide range of Formula 1 and racing media as it was not feasible to study all relevant media. Nevertheless, this study is not interested in its representativeness. Table 1 provides an overview of the five media included in this research.

Table 1

Media selected for research

	Motorsport.com	Sky Sports	F1i.com	GPFans	RacingNews365
<i>Type of media</i>	General motorsports specialized	News with sports section	Formula 1 specialized	Formula 1 specialized	General motorsports specialized
<i>Headquarters</i>	Florida, USA	Isleworth, UK	New York City, USA.	London, UK	Eindhoven, Netherlands
<i>Number of employees</i>	201-500	51-200	11-50	11-50	11-50
<i>Annual Revenue</i>	75-100 million	>1 billion	5-10 million	<5 million	2-5 million
<i>Number of monthly visitors</i>	24-42 million	61-65 million	208.7 thousand	16.2 million	1.5-4 million

Sampling criteria and Data corpus

Of the media examined, news and opinion articles about women in racing published after the rise of the #MeToo movement in October 2017 and until April 2023 were selected through purposive sampling. This timeframe ensures the results are recent and relevant for the current era of Formula 1, but also allows investigation of gender discourse following the rise of feminist activism in 2017 especially in the global north. Because ‘women in racing’ is a rather broad topic, only articles were considered if they met either of the following two major criteria. Firstly, articles in which women in racing are the main subject (e.g., generally about female athletes’ position in racing, main barriers women face in Formula 1, etc.). Secondly, articles discussing initiatives to support female racers, like the W-series and F1 Academy. Here, those articles which were merely factual reports were excluded as they did not have a meaningful debate that is rich enough for the purpose of a qualitative analysis. Finally, articles needed to be at least 300 words in length to offer rich insights.

The collection process started with a search on the website of all selected media and Google Advanced Search using relevant keywords (e.g., Data was collected through purposive sampling: articles are found based on keywords (e.g. ‘female drivers’, ‘women in racing’, ‘girls in motorsport’), recommended related articles, and specific archives (i.e. of the 2017-2023 seasons). Then, from the results, articles which met the above-mentioned criteria were selected for analysis. While collecting data, significant overlap between the topics of the articles from different media was observed (e.g., covering the same statement of a prominent actor). Furthermore, among the relevant articles, a substantial part was less than 300 words in length or offered merely factual reports. Consequently, they were excluded from consideration as they did not have a meaningful debate that is rich enough for the purpose of qualitative analysis. Ultimately, 45 articles were selected for analysis. Table 2 presents an overview of the number of relevant articles per medium and how many were selected for analysis based on the reasons outlined above.

Table 2*Sampling per medium*

Media	Keywords used for sampling	No. relevant articles	No. articles selected for analysis	Period of publication
<i>Motorsport.com</i>	-Female driver(s) / Female athlete(s) /			Nov 18, 2022
	Female/women racer(s)	11		– Oct 10,
	-Women/woman in F1/Formula 1/racing	14	14	2018
	-Girls in racing/motorsport	12		
<i>Sky Sports F1</i>	-Female driver(s) / Female athlete(s) /			Aug 13, 2018
	Female racer(s)	14		– Nov 18,
	-Women/woman in F1/Formula 1/racing	16	8	2022
	-Girls in racing/motorsport	11		
<i>F1i.com</i>	-Female driver(s) / Female athlete(s) /			Feb 4, 2018 –
	Female racer(s)	11		March 10,
	-Women/woman in F1/Formula 1/racing	13	9	2023
	-Girls in racing/motorsport	11		

<i>GPFans</i>	-Female driver(s) / Female athlete(s) /			Feb 4, 2018 –
	Female racer(s)	15		Nov 28, 2022
	-Women/woman in F1/Formula 1/racing	16	8	
	-Girls in racing/motorsport			
		13		
<i>RacingNews365</i>	-Female driver(s) / Female athlete(s) /			March 18,
	Female racer(s)	11		2021 - Dec
	-Women/woman in F1/Formula 1/racing	12	6	14, 2022
	-Girls in racing/motorsport			
		15		

3.3. Operationalization

Existing literature on women in racing revealed that historically, the dominant ideas, norms, and values about women in this sport reflected a patriarchal ideology that subordinates women morally, economically, politically, and socially. Therefore, the concept of hegemonic gender discourse is defined as meanings in the data such as explicit utterances evaluating women as inferior, but also on more implicit expressions that may seem unharmed on the surface, but still reproduce discriminatory ideas or gender stereotypes. As presented in Table 3 below, Hall's (1997) definition of discourse is the starting point, which is elaborated with concepts commonly articulated in existent research on gender roles and women in racing, like sexualization and assumed inferiority (Howe, 2022). Finally, Glick and Fiske's (1996) framework of ambivalent sexism is employed to further grasp the intricate nature of sexism and patriarchal ideas. It is important to note that the operationalizations serve as sensitising concepts with which the data is approached, but the coding was not restricted to them. Rather, an open approach to the data was adopted to still be receptive to new insights.

Table 3*Operationalization of hegemonic gender discourse*

Concept	Sub-concept(s)	Data examples	
<p>Hegemonic gender discourse: the dominant ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about gender, which affects ideas and norms related to this notion in society at large. (Hall, 1997)</p>	<p>Sexualization: attribution of emphasised heterosexual role to women in which they serve as lust objects for men. (Howe, 2022)</p>	<p>-“Commercially a female driver would be hugely successful with make-up, clothing, all the cosmetics and fashion brands (Delaney, 2018a, para. 9).</p>	
	<p>Trivialization: continuous dismissal and/or undervaluation of women. (Trolan, 2013)</p>	<p>-“IndyCar racer Pippa Mann, who has struggled to keep her career afloat in the US” (Duqué, 2018, para. 9). -“[is] forming a grid of these sub-elite drivers really a good idea?” (Mitchell, 2018, para. 14).</p>	
	<p>Inferiority: assumed or assigned lower status and/or quality. -Mental -Physical (Howe, 2022)</p>	<p>Hostile sexism: blatant negative evaluations of women. (Glick & Fiske, 2001)</p>	<p>-“[Women should] aim for Formula E instead of Formula 1 because it is less challenging” and “[women] cannot compete equally with men” (Morlidge, 2018, para. 1 & 2).</p>
	<p>Benevolent sexism: seemingly innocuous evaluations of women that disadvantage them in varying societal areas. (Glick & Fiske, 2001)</p>	<p>-“[Female drivers] need all the help they can get” (Bradley, 2022, para. 4).</p>	

Counter-hegemonic discourse, on the other hand, can take any form of opposing the dominant gender ideology from a progressive perspective. Therefore, counter-hegemonic gender discourse includes meanings that reflect alternative gender ideologies or challenge the patriarchal standard and the subordinate societal, political, economic, and moral position of women. Again, the focus is on both the explicit and implicit meaning of texts. As presented in Table 4, Hall's (1997) definition of discourse is again the starting point, which is complemented with ideas stemming from societal developments and theoretical concepts articulated in academic literature, like post feminism (Lazar, 2007).

Table 4*Operationalization of counter-hegemonic discourse*

Concept	Sub-concept(s)	Data examples
<p>Counter-hegemonic gender discourse: non-dominant ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about gender that attempt to critique or dismantle hegemonic power and aim to motivate social or political change.</p> <p>(Hall, 1997; Drezner, 2019)</p>	<p>Feminism: societal and theoretical movement aiming to lay bare how existing power structures are perpetuated and advocating for social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender equality - Gender performativity (Lazar, 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Female and male racing drivers can compete with one another on equal terms” (Delaney, 2018b, para. 6). -“Women racing drivers tend to reach a ‘glass ceiling’ (...), often as a result of a lack of funding rather than a lack of talent” (Mitchell, 2018, para. 10).
	<p>Post feminism: a new form of empowerment focusing on the individual rather than the collective.</p> <p>(Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independence - Gender hybridism -Female empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“My opinion is that women are actually stronger mentally than men are. I think we can push ourselves much further than men can” (van Osten, 2019, para. 7).
	<p>#MeToo gender discourses: gender discourses that became increasingly accessible to the public with the #MeToo movement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Advocacy & female empowerment -Dismantling persistent gender inequality and mistreatment (Tippett, 2018) -Respect, consent & equality (Burke, 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -“There’s a severe gender imbalance in motor sport and that is a problem” (Murphy, 2018, para. 9). -“I want to be part of this to help support female talent and bring more women into motorsport” (Macdonald, 2019, para. 8). “[Former Formula 1 champion] has slated stereotypical thinking” (Parkes & Hall, 2022, para. 1).

Finally, this study specifically focuses on prominent actors in Formula 1. People or institutions are considered prominent actors when they serve or have served a significant role in the sport that gives them a sense of authority to influence or judge the circumstances and events that occur. They are used by news media as ‘primary definers’: credible individuals or institutions granted media access to facilitate their initial framing of events which are assumed to be within their area of competence (Hall, 1978). Examples in Formula 1 are team bosses, (ex) drivers, and officials. Therefore, during the coding process, a code named “actors” was created that allowed to shed light on who the prominent actors or primary definers were in line with the broader aims of the study. Additionally, code groups were created for each actor to gain insight into potential differences or similarities related to gender discourse based on identifying categories such as age, gender, or role in the sport.

3.4. Data Processing & Analysis

Data was gathered from April 15th to May 1st and stored online and offline (flash drive). This study follows the six steps of thematic analysis as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The first step was getting familiar with the data. Before interpreting data in any way, it is important to be immersed in the dataset as a whole. This process included reading and re-reading the transcripts of the data, which entailed searching for meaning and patterns and noting down early impressions. Before engaging in coding, all data was read through entirely at least once (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The second step was generating initial codes. In this step, the data was organised in a meaningful and systemic way. Each component of the text that can be considered in a meaningful way was given an initial code. While the initial coding phase of the present study was inspired by some sensitising concepts as operationalized in the framework discussed previously in this chapter, it was not restricted by these and coding went beyond these original sensitising concepts to still be open to new insights. The entire data set was coded in a systematic, rigorous manner, with equal and full attention given to the units of analysis (articles) until all relevant segments are coded. During this process, interesting aspects of the data items were taken note of, creating a first basis of recurring patterns across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third step was creating themes. A theme is a pattern recurring throughout the data set that captures something interesting about and is significant to the data and/or research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). To establish themes, the initial codes of the previous step were sorted into coherent groups. Themes were then divided into main and sub-themes, depending on their importance and the relationship between themes, until all extracts of data that have been coded were covered.

The fourth step of thematic analysis concerned reviewing themes. This step involved the reconsideration, modification, and development of the preliminary themes identified in the previous phase. Themes were discarded, merged, and separated in varying ways until a cohesive whole was

established. To determine this, Patton's (1990) dual notions of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity were considered: while data within themes should cohere meaningfully, the distinctions between different themes should be clear and identifiable. Reviewing and refining themes was done on two levels. On the first level, the coded data extracts were re-evaluated. For each theme, all data extracts were read and it was considered if they seem to form a comprehensible pattern. If this was not the case, it was determined whether the theme is problematic in itself or if certain data extracts did not fit within it. Either the theme was adapted, a new one created, or data extracts were moved to another theme or discarded altogether. Once an adequate and satisfactory candidate thematic map was created, the first level of this step was completed. On the second level, a similar process was applied to the entire dataset. The validity of individual themes in relation to the data set was considered, but also whether the candidate thematic map is an accurate reflection of the evident meanings of the data set as a whole. In this phase, the entire data set was furthermore re-read to code any additional data missed in earlier coding stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fifth step was defining and naming themes, in which the essence of each theme was identified. For each theme, an analysis was conducted and written. Furthermore, themes were considered in relation to each other, to determine how each fits into the overarching story that the data tells (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final step of thematic analysis was reporting the results in a coherent, engaging, and convincing manner. Here it was especially important to select adequate examples for each theme and to combine them into a coherent analytic argument (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To facilitate conducting these six steps of thematic analysis, qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti was used. ATLAS.ti enables the researcher to store all data in an organized manner and breaks it down into segments that can be reduced to a set of codes (Soratto et al., 2020). ATLAS.ti allows the codes to be assigned different colours, which offered a coherent overview of coded data and emerging themes. It also has a separate space where sets of codes were grouped while preserving the individual codes. In this manner, it was possible to both analyse overarching themes and further investigate individual codes. Furthermore, an additional set of tools were used that were useful for the analysis (Soratto et al., 2020; Sybing, n.d.). The Code Manager tool was utilized to single out data with particular codes, to organize codes hierarchically, and to determine the frequency and level of theoretical development for each code. The Co-Occurrence analysis feature was used to determine if codes occur together frequently in the data, indicating a possible relationship. Finally, Word Frequencies was employed to access statistical data, for example words that occurred most frequently throughout the entire data set. In sum, ATLAS.ti greatly assisted in the process of analysis, saving time and ensuring no nuanced data was missed.

3.5. Methodological limitations

Naturally, no research is without limitations. To maximize validity and reliability, this study was designed based on existing research with similar topics and purposes. Moreover, transparency

about each step of the research was offered via a detailed review of the entire process from choosing media to examine to the coding process and the identification of final themes. Furthermore, the principle of constant comparison was employed by reconsidering the whole data set with each new code and adaptation in the process of analysis. Finally, a trial analysis of two articles was done to ensure compatibility between research intent, data, and research method. However, qualitative analysis is rather reliant on personal interpretation. As a woman, feminist, and Formula 1 fan, I might interpret data differently than a man with no prior knowledge about the sport or experience with misogyny. Although researchers cannot study data entirely independent of their frame of reference, I aimed to increase the quality of the study by mastering and adopting a critical feminist lens and using existing theoretical frameworks and conceptualizations to operationalize the concepts under study. By acknowledging this standpoint, the transparency of the study is further enhanced.

Another possible limitation concerns the study's sample, both in size and strategy. I may have missed keywords that could have garnered more relevant sources, but still, the data studied were enough for a rich analysis. Moreover, due to the limited timeframe of this study, only a select number of articles and media could be included. Consequently, aspects of the mediated gender discourse in Formula 1 beyond this timeframe were not covered. However, I believe the study in its current form is sufficiently rich for an important period of time, the aftermath of the #MeToo movement. Moreover, it has allowed for valuable insights into mediated gender discourses in Formula 1, as I have ensured to utilize media as sources that are of significant importance to both the world of Formula 1 itself and its fans. They are commonly used as sources for smaller media and offer extensive repertoires of in-depth articles. As such, they play a significant role in shaping the mediated gender discourse in Formula 1.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained thematic analysis and justified its use for this study. critical feminism is employed as the main theoretical lens and supported by additional theoretical frameworks, such as the ambivalent sexism framework developed by Glick and Fiske (1996). The process of data sampling, processing, and analysis was discussed in detail, following the six steps of thematic analysis as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006). Additionally, hegemonic gender discourse, counter-hegemonic discourse, and prominent actors were operationalized based on existing research. Finally, possible methodological limitations like reliance on personal interpretation and a limited number of sources limitations were recognized and justified.

4. Results

This chapter presents the study's results and is organized into five sections. It begins with an overview of gender and primary definers as this can help to contextualize the analytical themes. Then, it is shown how both traditionally hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourses are reproduced in media through the discussion of three overarching themes as observed in the data: advocacy and support, undermining and underrating, and barriers and solutions for female inclusion. Finally, a brief conclusion completes the chapter.

4.1. Primary definers: male dominance

Examining the role of prominent actors in mediated gender discourse reproduction in Formula 1, there were no relevant differences found in the gender ideologies they encouraged based on their defining categories. Both men and women with different ages and roles reproduced as well as challenged traditionally hegemonic gender discourse. What is interesting, however, is whom the media allow to shape gender discourses in motorsport by using them as primary definers. The elite actors in Formula 1, including team bosses, drivers or officials and who were repeatedly quoted in the media studied, are predominantly male. This was confirmed in the analysis, as almost all Formula 1 actors included in the articles were men with varying roles in the upper echelon of motorsport. This is in line with Bernstein's (2002) findings of 20 years ago suggesting women are underrepresented in sports media. However, although the authoritative roles in Formula 1 are still mostly held by men, it was found that women are nevertheless included in the mediated debate. While not Formula 1 actors specifically, women currently active in Formula 1's feeder series or other racing disciplines and women with other roles in motorsport were given a voice to shape the gender discourse in Formula 1's media. A full overview of the quoted actors is offered in Appendix B. Women's inclusion in itself could be considered challenging the traditionally hegemonic gender practises and subsequently discourse in Formula 1, as it portrays these women in a role of authority where they are considered credible sources and qualified to offer expertise. Previously, this role was not granted to women in racing, who were invisible in mainstream media (Matthews & Pike, 2016). However, both male and female actors actively challenged and reinforced traditionally hegemonic gender discourse. The remainder of this chapter will elaborate on this duality of the mediated gender discourse in Formula 1 through the discussion of three major themes.

4.2. Advocating for female support

The first theme is advocacy and support, which discusses how media articles and quoted actors expressed approval of women's inclusion in motorsport and campaigned actively for improved gender equality. The broader theme of advocacy and support was found to be manifested in texts studied in varying ways and it is organized in three sub-themes.

Activism and Accountability

The sub-theme of activism and accountability centres around fighting for change and who is responsible. Commonly, the first step was recognizing that gender equality is lacking in racing and that this is problematic. In one of the articles, the CEO of the W Series noted: "there's a severe gender imbalance in motor sport and that's a problem" (Murphy, 2018, para. 9), whereas another medium was even more critical claiming that "It's almost impossible for a female racing driver to reach Formula 1" (Mitchell, 2018, para. 1). This is the full extract of the last quote:

Motorsport is not [segregated], although if the purpose of not doing so is to allow the very best to fight one another in a fair environment, then to all intents and purposes its upper echelons might as well be. It's almost impossible for a female racing driver to reach Formula 1.

As the quotations above show, a clear difference is depicted between male and female racers, regarding their asymmetrical positions in the sport in terms of status, opportunities, and prospects. Moreover, this disparity was condemned as problematic. This is in stark contrast with studies depicting historical trends in which the absence of women in racing went largely unaddressed in media and was assumed to be natural (Matthews & Pike, 2016). Therefore, narratives like these challenge traditional patriarchal ideas about gender in which gender inequality- and specifically female inferiority- is normalised based on the biological differences between men and women (Nash, 2020). Instead, newfound attention for and opposition against persistent gender inequality issues such as mistreatment in professional spheres reflects counter-hegemonic gender discourses that became increasingly publicised with the #MeToo movement, which might contribute to this shift (Tippett, 2018).

Once a problem was identified, this was often followed by either the articles' authors or prominent actors issuing a call to action. This is related to a theme that will be discussed later in this chapter, in which concrete solutions for gender inequality in racing are debated. Here, however, only the discursive call for active change itself is concerned and more specifically, with whom responsibility is placed. Often, accountability was ascribed to various groups in motorsport. One medium wrote: "[fighting for female inclusion in racing] is a concern for all, including the male figures in motorsport who realistically have the most power in the current state of play" (Francis, 2022, Beyond a battle for women section, para. 1). Utterances like this do not only push for active change but also widen the scope of the struggle to include those with the power to enforce change. Ignorance in the name of lacking awareness or assumed exemption is no longer accepted. This is exemplified by a statement of the Head of Communications for racing series Extreme E, who stressed that everyone in racing plays a role in the way female drivers are (mis)treated, even if they do not immediately realise it themselves: "I think [improved gender equality] is up to everyone in terms of responsibility, I think it's absolutely everyone from the team owners, to the marketing managers, to the FIA to female drivers themselves, and male drivers as well supporting them" (*How*

women are tackling barriers, 2023, para. 15).

The recurrent understanding in the media was that while women suffer from gender inequality in racing, it is not (solely) their problem to solve. Rather, fighting for equality is a fight concerning all, especially those in positions of power. Many of the prominent actors recognized that and expressed their commitment to improving gender equality in racing. In one of the articles, a former Formula 1 driver and Grand Prix winner expressed his desire to help increase the number of women participating in motorsport: "I want to be part of this to help support female talent and bring more women into motorsport" (Macdonald, 2019, para. 8), whereas in another, the FIA president vowed the governing institution's commitment to improving opportunities for when women do get involved in racing: "the FIA and FOM are committed to greater opportunity for women in the sport" (Parkes, 2022a, para. 9).

This further stresses the importance of improving gender equality and encourages the idea that the traditional status quo needs to be transcended and women deserve to be included in the sport. Advocacy for gender equality and female empowerment are recurring themes in counter-hegemonic gender discourses that became increasingly widespread in the global north with the #MeToo movement (Tippet, 2018). Furthermore, challenging patriarchal gender norms aligns with common themes identified in counter-hegemonic discourses by both Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) and Sheik et al. (2019).

(Positive) Evaluations of female drivers and exclusively female racing series

Secondly, varying discursive strategies were applied to create a positive narrative about female drivers and all-female racing series. Regarding the creation of positive narratives about female drivers, the main strategies observed are eulogizing and equalising. When eulogizing occurred, female drivers were praised for their racing abilities, ascribed superiority compared to men, and emphasis was placed on their achievements. One of the media praised W Series driver Jamie Chadwick and mentioned her success against men specifically: "Chadwick is likely Britain's fastest female driver, having won against boys as a junior and claimed both W Series titles so far" (*Drive for change*, 2022, What are the hurdles section, para. 3). In another article, one of the few former female Formula 1 drivers takes it even further as she argues for general female superiority regarding mental strength. She stated: "my opinion is that women are actually stronger mentally than men are. I think we can push ourselves much further than men" (van Osten, 2019, para. 7).

When equalising occurred, men and women were placed on equal footing in terms of racing compatibility, skill, and future prospects. This is exemplified by a statement of a former Formula 1 driver and Grand Prix winner who said: "we (...) firmly believe that female and male racing drivers can compete with one another on equal terms given the same opportunity" (Delaney, 2018b, para. 6).

Related to this, similar discursive strategies portraying women in racing positively were observed in the articles, but here they occurred specifically in the context of exclusively female racing series. The discursive strategies mainly manifested in the form of positive evaluations of the

racing- and driver quality in all-female racing series and acknowledgment of the importance and role of such disciplines. For example, a Formula 1 driver and Grand Prix winner praised the W Series joining on Formula 1's own calendar: "it should be followed, like any other women's sport it's, many times, underrated and it's actually really interesting to watch, but there's no coverage, so I think it's a really, really good thing" (Delaney, 2020, para. 12). In another article, it was stressed how exclusively female racing series should act as gateways for women to higher levels of racing and not final destinations: "the aim of [W Series] was to act as a feeder series, enabling female drivers to be given an opportunity to show their skills and ultimately go on to climb the ladder up to higher ranks of motorsport" (Francis, 2021, para. 11).

Reiterating that female drivers measure up to men, praising exclusively female racing series, and emphasising women's successes, works to improve the status of female racers and increasingly normalises their presence in motorsport. Consequently, traditionally dominant conceptions of women in motorsport as inferior and abnormal and female sports as unworthy of watching are challenged (Howe, 2022; Pflugfelder, 2009). The prevalence of discursive female empowerment in the media furthermore shows a development in mediated gender discourse in racing. Historically, when women were not left out of the narrative entirely, they and their achievements were trivialized and unvalued (Cooky et al., 2015). A newfound appreciation and recognition of women's capabilities and success supports Antunovic and Whiteside's (2018) findings that there has been a positive trend of increasing visibility of female athletes in media, as well as decreasing differences in the type of framing between male and female athletes.

Furthermore, counter-hegemonic gender discourses commonly challenge the status quo by deconstructing gender stereotypes and portraying women with traits typically considered male (Adriaens and Van Bauwel, 2014). In this case, gender stereotypes that women are bad drivers and too weak for extreme sports are deconstructed, while female racers are also portrayed with male-associated traits such as mental strength. Interestingly, only hegemonic femininity was directly challenged. Deconstructing hegemonic masculinity, for example through the depiction of men with traditionally feminine traits as Sheik et al. (2019) denote was not found in the present study. A possible explanation for this difference could be that the studied articles centred around female drivers specifically, leaving a more elaborate narrative on male drivers out of scope.

Finally, stressing the importance of exclusively female racing disciplines further acknowledges the struggle women face in racing and reinforces the belief that this should be changed. This is in line with what scholars like Tippett (2018) depict as characterizing contemporary counter-hegemonic gender discourses: reiterating that gender equality persists in today's age and advocating for change. Additionally, emphasising the temporary nature of all-female racing initiatives and reiterating that they act as gateways is important because such initiatives are at risk of being forces of segregation. Separating female racers can reinforce hegemonic ideas of women being unable to compete alongside men. Consequently, women might end up restricted to sub-par classes rather than offered a way into higher series (Mitchell, 2018). By reiterating that all-female racing

series act as temporary stepping stones, women are not undermined in their quest to Formula 1. Rather, the idea that they deserve to be there and initiatives like the W Series serve to remove the obstacles withholding them from doing so is reinforced.

Criticism and backlash

While the previous sub-themes centre around positive narratives about women and their inclusion in motorsport, advocacy and support also manifest in the form of opposing harmful narratives. Here, clear condemnation of negative narratives about female drivers was expressed. One of the articles reports how a former Formula 1 driver and four-time World Champion "has slated 'stereotypical thinking' after [Formula 1 CEO] claimed that "realistically" there would be no female F1 driver in the next five years" (Parkes & Hall, 2022, para. 1).

Especially interesting here was an observed feedback loop recurring in the articles in response to such backlash. For example, a Formula 1 team boss backtracked when his original statement about female drivers being too fragile for Formula 1 was met with backlash both in Formula 1's media and on social media: "I was at first misinterpreted. I said at the moment I don't see any female who could be competitive in Formula 1. (...) From a Red Bull perspective we'd be delighted to see more girls coming into the sport" (*Helmut Marko clarifies*, 2019, para. 4-6). Interestingly, a pattern of criticism and consequent backtracking almost exclusively occurred when the original statement reflected patriarchal ideas on gender norms and roles and was harmful to women in racing. This shows how media are a space of debate in which different discourses interact but also suggests a change in dominant gender discourse might be occurring. This is in line with the shift away from traditional patriarchal ideas in gender discourse as denoted by Sheik et al. (2019).

Criticism was not limited to views on female drivers and their role in the sport. In another article, the medium expressed its opposition against exclusively-female racing series, saying that "(...) The series only heightened gender segregation rather than promoting equality" (Francis, 2021, para. 11). Criticism against perspectives disadvantaging women directly challenges traditionally hegemonic gender discourse, in which these were the norm (Matthews & Pike, 2016). Perhaps seeming counter-intuitive, resistance against all-female racing series serves as advocacy in the same way as support of such initiatives. This is because both sides plead for improved opportunity and treatment of female drivers, but their ideas on realising such change differ. Narratives opposing all-female racing series can still challenge dominant gender discourse in racing as it opposes gender differentiation and promotes the idea that female drivers should be and are capable of racing against their male peers.

4.3. Undermining women's efforts

The previous theme exemplifies the side of the mediated debate challenging traditionally hegemonic gender discourse aiming to improve the position and status of female drivers. However, traditionally dominant gender discourse was also reproduced in varying ways. This section discusses

the systematic undermining of female drivers, which commonly occurred in both sports and racing media for decades (Trolan, 2013; Pflugfelder, 2009). Generally, this theme concerns meanings and discursive strategies that undermine the power and abilities of female drivers and undervalue their skills, achievements, and prospects.

Negative evaluations of female drivers and racing series

Similarly to the theme of advocacy and support, evaluations of female drivers and -racing series were a prominent subject in media content undermining and underrating women based on their gender or perceptions about their gender. Here, female drivers were depicted as inferior and emphasis was placed on their failures. A female member of the FIA's Women in Motorsport Commission was quoted in one of the articles claiming women should lower their expectations and "aim for Formula E instead of Formula 1 because it is less challenging" and women simply "cannot compete equally with men" (Morlidge, 2018, para. 1 & 2). In other articles, female drivers' inferiority in comparison with their male counterparts was expressed less literally but insinuated to the same extent. Commonly, this manifested in reiteration of the failures of female drivers. For example, when the intent was simply to report her opinion on the W Series, one article introduced female driver Pippa Mann as: "IndyCar racer Pippa Mann, who has struggled to keep her career afloat in the US" (Duqué, 2018, para. 9). A conscious decision was made to introduce her by focusing (only) on her failures, rather than her achievements like winning the Nürburgring 24 Hours. Choices like these affect the perception of female drivers.

In addition to these blatant negative portrayals of women, women were also undermined in a way that may seem unharmed on the surface, but still, challenges their status and position in the sport to the same extent. The most commonly recurring narrative here was female drivers needing help to progress in racing. One article writes: "[female drivers] need all the help they can get" (Bradley, 2022, para. 4). Interestingly, this pattern appeared mostly in articles advocating for improved gender equality in racing, which shows that regardless of intention, the way media shape narratives affects the gender discourse and respective ideas and norms being reproduced.

Finally, exclusively female racing series were dismissed and marginalised. One article wonders about all-female racing series if "forming a grid of these sub-elite drivers [is] really a good idea?" (Mitchell, 2018, para. 14). This is the full extract of this quote:

Part of the reason its architects believe [W Series] is needed is that there are no major female talents around. If there were, they'd be in, or be close to, F1. Therefore, is forming a grid of these sub-elite drivers really a good idea?

Conceptions of women as being inferior to men align with traditional hegemonic gender discourses in motorsport media, in which women were often considered to be too weak or lack driving skills on the basis of being a woman (Matthews & Pike, 2016). Their perseverance in contemporary

gender debates continues to be harmful to the position of female drivers and shows a consistent reproduction of such patriarchal gender discourses in the world of racing. This supports Antunovic and Whiteside's (2018) findings depicting a historical trend of undervaluation and disadvantaging of women in (professional) sports.

Moreover, emphasis on female drivers' failures encourages a one-sided story in which women are indeed not capable of competing against men. The records of their failures serve as proof for such ideas, further reinforcing conventional gender discourses that restrict female participation and naturalise male dominance and superiority (Nash, 2020). Therefore, like Kane et al. (2013) have also argued, the media frame female sports and athletes in particular ways that are harmful to their status and prospects. However, the type of framing observed in the present study differs. Historically, media portrayals of female athletes focused on their beauty, emotion, and personal lives instead of their athletic skills and performance (Kane et al., 2013; Messner et al., 1993). Now, the focus is on their athletic skills and performance, but they are still framed in such a way that female athletes are undermined, showing a consistent trend of reproduction of patriarchal norms and ideas despite a shift in focus.

Furthermore, even narratives pleading for improved gender equality can be harmful in this manner. The most prominent example here was a consistent narrative of female drivers needing help to reach the upper echelons of racing, rather than, for example, that the barriers withholding them from doing so should be removed. While probably well-intended, this encourages the idea that women are unable to reach Formula 1 on merit and places them in a subordinate role where they need to be helped by outside forces. These two contrasting ways in which female drivers are undermined align with Glick and Fiske's (1996) ambivalent sexism framework that differentiates between blatant, hostile and subtle, benevolent forms of sexism. While different in nature, both are harmful to the power and position of women and reinforce conventional ideas about gender (Christopher, 2006). Finally, undervaluing exclusively female racing series hurts the credibility of their drivers, again perpetuating beliefs that female drivers do not measure up to their male peers.

Time frame and realism

Another way in which women's efforts in racing were undermined in the media was through the reiteration of a need to be realistic about women in racing and speculations about the expected time frame in which we might see a woman in Formula 1. In one article, the CEO of Formula 1 compared a woman coming into Formula 1 to a meteorite crashing into earth: "realistically speaking, I don't see - unless there will be something that will be like some sort of meteorite coming into the earth - a girl coming into Formula 1 in the next five years" (Noble, 2022a, para. 4). Even the founder and CEO of the W Series did not believe women can progress to Formula 1 any time soon: "getting a competitive woman into F1 was always going to be a long-term ambition" (Noble, 2022a, para. 12).

Narratives like these undermine the efforts of female drivers currently active in the sport by promoting the idea that they are not worth investing in because they will not make it to Formula 1

anyway. Moreover, it postpones the struggle for gender equality. Erasing women from the upper echelons of racing for the foreseeable future reinforces the belief that it is a male-dominated field in which women would be abnormalities, which Pflugfelder (2009) and Matthews and Pike (2016) also argue is an idea that has been consistently present and reproduced in racing to ensure the maintenance of this male dominance since its very conception.

Tokenism and disproportionate requirements

Finally, the media undermine female drivers in racing through tokenism and shaping disproportionate requirements. In the former, women's inclusion and initiatives to increase this are framed in such a way that women are or should be part of racing for the sake of diversity or other reasons rather than their driving abilities. For example, when talking about the new F1 Academy for female drivers, the Formula 1 CEO said: "Formula 1 wants to ensure we are doing everything we can to create greater diversity and routes into this incredible sport. That is why I am delighted to announce the F1 Academy" (*Formula 1 launches F1 Academy*, 2022, para. 5 & 6). In the latter, expectations and requirements that women should meet before they should be allowed into Formula 1 are discussed, but these do not mirror those imposed on their male counterparts. In one of the articles, a former Formula 1 driver and Grand Prix winner states that "there are females competing in the current W Series who are capable of making the switch to Formula 1, but anyone who does will need to be able to match the likes of Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen" (Macdonald, 2019, para. 1).

Advocating for increased female inclusion in racing can benefit the status of female drivers. However, placing the focus on diversity rather than female drivers' competency can perpetuate beliefs that the women in motorsport are there to meet a quota, rather than having earned their chances based on merit. This, in turn, reinforces traditionally dominant perceptions of women not being good enough for Formula 1 by the nature of their gender (Howe, 2022). Moreover, many of the initiatives aiming to help a woman to Formula 1 stress their search for a female Formula 1 champion. Additionally, broader discussions on women in racing state requirements for women to be allowed in Formula 1, like being able to match Sir Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen. This seems rather outlandish as the same is certainly not expected of every male driver in and on the road to Formula 1. The last ten years of Formula 1 saw only two different world champions, but dozens of drivers, of whom many never won a race. Furthermore, Sir Lewis Hamilton is statistically the most successful Formula 1 driver in history (Harrington, 2023). Max Verstappen is the current champion well on his way to win his third consecutive championship, he has broken many records, and is already deemed one of the all-time greats (Rosberg, 2022). Thus, most male drivers will not become world champions or match these two titans, but it does not withhold them from being 'allowed' into Formula 1. As such, statements like these cast women in subordinate positions and present them as inferior drivers. Namely, the idea is created that women do not belong in Formula 1 unless they are once-in-a-generation exceptions like Sir Lewis Hamilton. If they are not, they are inferior to male

drivers by default and do not belong in Formula 1. Consequently, this reinforces patriarchal ideas about male superiority and racing as a space in which men are the norm, supporting Pflugfelder's (2009) argument that lenses like the media create gendered narratives about racing which depict women as inherently different and disruptions to the nature of racing.

4.4. Barriers to women's inclusion and solutions: a personal matter or a structural one?

The first two themes discuss broader trends in the discursive strategies on either side of the mediated gender debate in racing. The final theme, in contrast, discusses two specific, interrelated subjects that were particularly prominent in the data from both perspectives. The first concerns the barriers or the causes of gender inequality in motorsport. The main point of conflict here was whether barriers for female racers related to personal inadequacy or structural issues that encourage inequality. The second is solutions, or what needs to happen for women to reach the upper echelons of racing. Again, there were two clear, opposing narratives evident in the data. Which one occurred directly related to the narrative about barriers. The first narrative surrounding solutions centred around personal improvement and the impossibility of women in Formula 1 and the second around fundamental restructuring of motorsport. Ideas on barriers and solutions occurred in the articles in conjunction, creating narratives about gender inequality in racing being either a personal or structural matter.

Personal inadequacy and the physicality of racing Vs structural factors

From one side of the debate, international racing media and the prominent actors quoted depicted female drivers and women, in general, themselves as the source of women's inferior position in Formula 1. Most commonly, personal inadequacy, like a lack of driving skill, and women's inability to cope with the physical demands of racing in Formula 1 were portrayed as the main causes of gender inequality in racing. When asked about the possibility of a woman getting into Formula 1, a Formula 1 team advisor said: "if you're driving at 300km/h and have a wheel-to-wheel fight then brutality is part of it. I do not know if that's in the female nature" (Lewin, 2019, para. 2). A Formula 1 team boss went even further and denied gender inequality altogether, claiming that "There aren't barriers, and if the talent is strong enough, it will permeate its way into Formula 1, because, you know, we're all very selfish individuals that we want the best drivers, regardless of background, gender, etcetera" (Gale, 2022a, para. 9).

In these narratives, women are ascribed an inferiority against their male peers that has its origins in the intrinsic biological differences between men and women. Because women are unable to overcome these genetic differences, the idea that women cannot compete with men in racing on equal footing is reinforced consequently. Biological arguments have always been particularly prominent in historically dominant gender discourse in racing media and have been used in society at large for centuries to justify patriarchal power relations that restrict women to a lower status (Nash, 2020). Their continued existence indicates the persistent reproduction of such discourses and gender

ideology, especially in racing which is consistent with what Matthews and Pike (2016) have argued about racing media trends throughout history.

On the other side of the debate, however, women are relieved from any form of responsibility for the gap they face in racing. While it is not denied that female drivers may lack the same skill and experience as their male peers, it is argued that the structures underlying motorsport withhold women from developing them in the same way as their male peers. As a former Formula 1 driver noted in one of the articles: “women racing drivers tend to reach a ‘glass ceiling’ at around the GP3/Formula 3 level on their learning curve, often as a result of a lack of funding rather than a lack of talent” (Mitchell, 2018, para. 10). Motorsport is a male-dominated area and its existent system serves to maintain these disparate power relations between men and women: technology is developed with the male body as its blueprint; sponsorships and funding are easier to obtain for men; and male drivers are offered more opportunities, track-, and testing time to gain experience and develop their race craft. Female drivers themselves recognized these issues, one currently active in the W Series said: “I think it's harder as a female at times, because people still see it as a male-dominated sport, so might not want to really put their money behind a female, where they see it's male-dominated” (White, 2022b, para. 28).

These underlying structures, as is argued in the studied articles, withhold women from reaching the upper echelons of motorsport. This lack of representation at the top, however, is what creates a vicious cycle in which women remain absent from the higher levels of racing. Namely, lacking representation and visibility of women in motorsport leaves young girls without role models and reinforces the idea that racing is not a space in which they belong. As is argued in one of the articles: “there are no major title-winning female role models. So, given most young people become particularly interested in a sport by finding a story they can relate to, it's harder to inspire young girls” (Mitchell, 2018, para. 5). Another article is even more critical, stressing it is not just a lack of female driver representation, but general visibility of women in key roles in motorsport beyond the stereotypical ones: “the only roles visibly taken by women seemed to be either grid girl, press officer or TV anchor” (Francis, 2021, para. 3). As a result, the pool of female drivers remains small and women in racing are still exceptions rather than the norm.

Discursive strategies as exemplified by the quotations above challenge conventional perspectives placing biological differences and inferiority at the heart of gender inequality in racing by highlighting how existing racing structures benefit men and disadvantage women. They reflect feminist counter-hegemonic discourses that focus on and seek to challenge underlying societal structures that are the source of women’s restricted social, political, and economic power (Lazar, 2007).

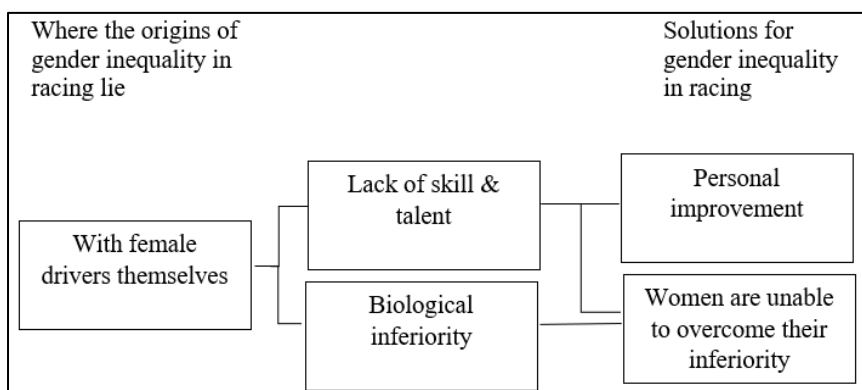
Personal development Vs Fundamental restructuring and inclusion efforts

At the end of the debate that places the core causes of gender inequality in motorsport with women themselves, it is argued that personal development is key to increased inclusion of women in

racing. A W Series driver said in one of the articles that testing for Formula 3 helps female drivers identify “preparation they might need to take physically, mentally, to step up to the next level” (White, 2022b, para. 21). Utterances like these were less common in the data because it was often argued that women are inherently worse drivers than men and too weak for Formula 1 by their biological composition. Consequently, they will never be able to compete with men in the upper disciplines of motorsport at all. This is visible in quotations mentioned earlier in this chapter stating women should aim for less challenging racing series like Formula E and that the brutal racing required for Formula 1 is simply not in the female nature. Figure 1 shows a visual representation of narratives framing gender inequality in racing as a personal matter. Regardless of whether a solution for women to reach the top levels of racing is theorised in the form of personal development or this is deemed impossible entirely, both reinforce hegemonic ideas about female drivers being inherently inferior to men and undermine women’s efforts to progress in the sport. This is consistent with Trolan’s (2013) argument that despite the increasing popularity of female sports, the media continue to depict female athletes as inferior.

Figure 1

Narratives framing gender inequality in racing as a personal matter



On the other end of the debate, it was commonly argued that inclusion efforts should be improved and increased and that the pyramid of motorsport in general should be restructured fundamentally. Increased and improved inclusion efforts serve to level the playing field between men and women regarding opportunities. This includes more women in traditional support and sponsorship programs, access to facilities that help drivers improve like track- and testing time, but also improved participation, visibility and representation of women in driver and other key roles. One article writes: “what is needed to make the break-through to F1 are: better talent detection at an early stage and then funding and other professional support for a defined program through to F1” (Allen, 2022, para. 3). Underneath is the full extract of this quote:

What is needed to make the break-through to F1 are: better talent detection at an early stage and then funding and other professional support for a defined program through to F1. This is

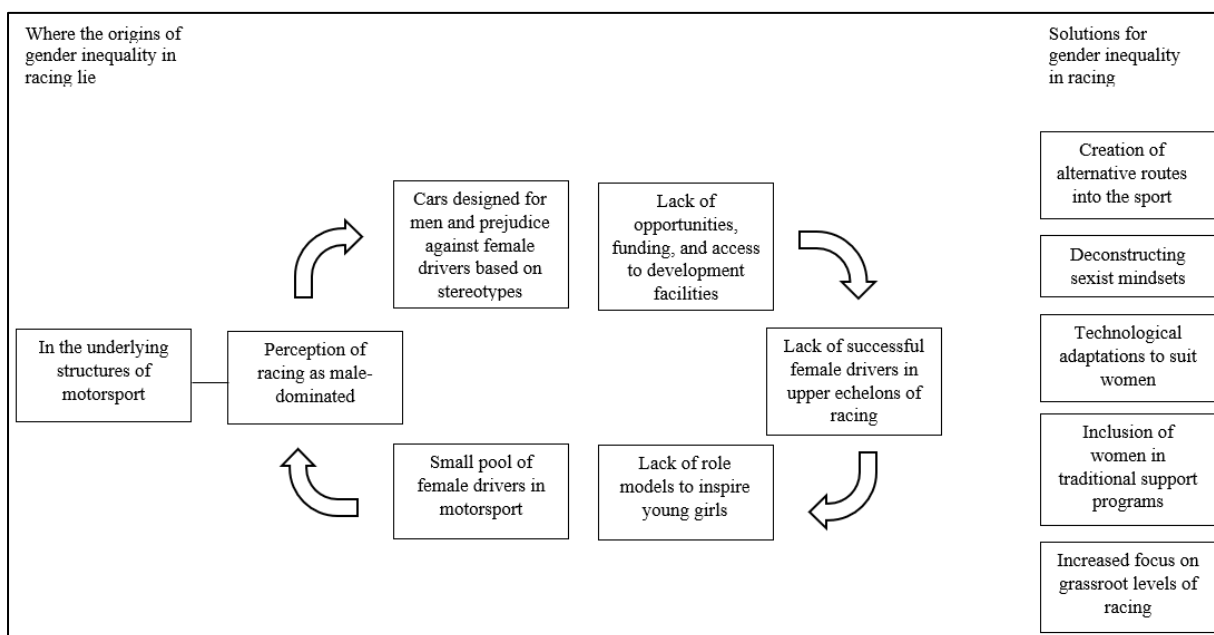
what most of the household name male drivers from Lewis Hamilton to Lando Norris have benefitted from one way or another.

Fundamental restructuring of motorsport encompasses varying aspects. One article focused specifically on deconstructing sexist mindsets, stating that it is needed to “Seek through data and research to break down misconceptions about women racers, such as lack of strength, aggression, or willingness to put themselves in harm’s way” (Allen, 2022, para. 12). In another, the Formula 1 CEO argued the whole pyramid of motorsport needs to be restructured, starting from the bottom: “we’re trying to understand how we can prepare the right pyramid also for the girls to come into the pyramid at the right age with the right car. This is the key point” (Noble, 2022b, Five-year timescale section, para. 9). Generally, recurring themes in restructuring efforts were deconstructing sexist mindsets, technological adaptations to fit female drivers, the creation of alternative spaces and routes for women into the sport, and increased focus and support for young girls on the grassroots level of racing.

Advocacy for active change like this does not only challenge beliefs that women should not be in Formula 1 but also that they could not be. Instead of women lacking the talent and driving skill to make it to Formula 1, their talents and efforts are compromised by the existing racing structures that inherently benefit men. As such, the beliefs on which the motorsport system is built are actively challenged and instead, a narrative is created in which women are competent drivers, but just have not had the chance to show it yet. Figure 2 shows a visual representation of narratives framing gender inequality in racing as a structural issue. Scholars like Antunovic and Whiteside (2018) already denoted positive trends in the portrayal of female athletes in media in terms of inclusion and type of framing. However, these types of active advocacy imply such trends have progressed even further and media are increasingly tools utilised to encourage social change.

Figure 2

Narratives framing gender inequality in racing as a structural issue



4.5. Conclusion

In sum, mediated gender discourse in Formula 1 is fundamentally two-sided. On one hand, traditionally hegemonic discourses that erase and undermine women in the sport prevail and continue to be reproduced by the media and quoted prominent actors. On the other hand, however, traditionally dominant gender discourses are actively being challenged by counter-hegemonic gender discourses that advocate for gender equality and female empowerment and seek to deconstruct gender stereotypes, roles, and norms. Media serve as a space for debate where these perspectives interact and conflict. Notably, while the voices of women themselves were traditionally absent in the mediated gender debate, they now increasingly act as authorities and are allowed to shape the framing of female racers in media. The final chapter further reflects on these findings in light of the broader academic field and answers the research question.

5. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the key research findings in relation to the research aims and questions and discussing the value and contribution thereof. It also reviews the limitations of the study and proposes opportunities for future research.

This thesis has investigated how international sports and racing media reproduce or challenge hegemonic gender discourses in their online news and opinion articles in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Moreover, the role of prominent actors in this process was specifically examined. Through qualitative thematic analysis, it was determined that media serve as a space for debate. Rather than exclusively reinforcing dominant or counter-hegemonic gender norms and ideas, media offer a space where both interact and coexist.

The findings show that hegemonic gender discourses continue to be reproduced by Formula 1 media. This primarily occurred through the undermining of women manifested in discursive reinforcement of patriarchal gender norms. In line with Kane et al. (2013), the media still frame female athletes in a way that impacts them negatively. However, a shift towards a focus on their athletic abilities and achievements was observed. Still, these are framed in an overtly negative manner, creating a one-sided story of inferiority. Media emphasised female athletes' failures and questioned their physical abilities, which aligns with historical patterns of undermining and harmful stereotypes in racing media denoted by Matthews and Pike (2016).

Moreover, women's inclusion in racing was often framed as tokenism rather than based on their driving abilities. Furthermore, prominent actors in the sport reiterated that it would be a long time before a woman could compete in Formula 1, thus erasing the current efforts of female drivers and perpetuating the idea of a male-dominated field. Finally, female racers were held to a higher standard than their male counterparts to be allowed into Formula 1. This further stresses their inferiority and supports Pflugfelder's (2009) argument that forces like the media portray women as disruptions in racing.

However, in stark contrast with the one-sided narrative that scholars like Matthews and Pike (2016) argue has prevailed in racing media for decades, the mediated gender debate is no longer homogenous. Formula 1 media also challenge hegemonic and promote counter-hegemonic discourses. In line with prior research, contemporary counter-hegemonic discourses commonly challenge patriarchal gender norms and practices (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). Female drivers were portrayed as equal or even superior to men and assigned male-associated traits. Interestingly, only hegemonic femininity was challenged, while other research also noted the challenging of hegemonic masculinity (Sheik et al., 2019).

Moreover, the studied media and actors actively advocated for improved female inclusion, expressed their support for gender equality initiatives, and criticized conventional narratives and attitudes undermining women. This contests ideas depicting female racers as inferior and increasingly normalises women's presence in the sport. Newfound attention for persistent gender equality issues and discursive advocacy and empowerment reflects common themes in the counter-

hegemonic discourses that became increasingly prevalent in the wake of the #MeToo movement (Burke, 2021). Furthermore, it supports claims that media portrayal of female athletes is improving (Antunovic and Whiteside, 2018).

Recurring narratives about the causes and solutions for gender inequality in racing exemplify the dual nature of the mediated gendered debate in Formula 1. One side reproduces hegemonic discourses by depicting women's biological inferiority and lack of skill as the causes of gender inequality in racing and doubting the feasibility of gender equality in racing. The other side of the debate challenges hegemonic discourses by ascribing gender inequality in racing to the underlying system that inherently benefits men and disadvantages women. Here, a fundamental restructuring of attitudes, support programs, technology, and the racing pyramid is required for improved gender equality.

Furthermore, this thesis sheds light on the role of prominent actors in the mediated gender debate. Prominent actors were used to reinforce the narrative encouraged in all articles, but some were also criticised. Interestingly, despite the included prominent actors of Formula 1 being predominantly male, this did not mean women were excluded from the narrative. Rather, women with varying driver and other roles in motorsport were granted authority and a platform to act as credible experts shaping gender discourses in Formula 1. This in itself could be considered challenging hegemonic gender practices and discourses in Formula 1, as women were generally not perceived to be worthy of such roles (Kochanek et al., 2021). No prominent differences were found in terms of the encouraged gender discourses based on the prominent actors' identifying categories. Instead, men and women with varying ages and roles in the sport were found to both reproduce and challenge hegemonic gender discourses.

Finally, this study provides further insight into both the more explicit and more implicit ways sexist ideologies might manifest in discourses. Glick and Fiske's (1996) ambivalent Sexism framework posits that sexism manifests in two sub-components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The results of this study aligned with their suggestion that both forms are prevalent and show how they manifest in gender discourses in racing. Similarly to what Glick and Fiske argue, hostile sexism mainly reflected negative evaluations and gender stereotypes about women. Particularly, female drivers were depicted as innately inferior to men and physically too weak for competitive driving. Benevolent sexism is mainly manifested in the forms of narratives about female drivers needing help from outside forces to progress in motorsport. This reinforces the idea that female racers do not measure up to men based on merit. Furthermore, patterns of backlash against overtly negative evaluations of female drivers and harmful gender stereotypes and inclusion of benevolent sexism in articles advocating for gender equality were observed. This suggests that in an area of increased accountability and backlash, a further development towards more subtle or benevolent forms might be observed.

In sum, this thesis builds on existing academic work on mediated gender discourse and motorsport and fills gaps in the literature by expanding the research with contemporary data.

Moreover, it has added to the limited amount of literature on Formula 1. Furthermore, it has considered gender discourses especially after a major social event has occurred that significantly impacted gender relations and feminist issues. As such, it demonstrates the prevalence of the #MeToo movement and the gender discourses it promotes and shows how these are reflected in Formula 1. Finally, the increasing pervasiveness of counter-hegemonic discourses in Formula 1 media and an observed pattern of backlash against hegemonic gender discourses and practices suggests a shift in hegemony might be occurring.

5.1. Societal or practical implications

This thesis has a number of societal and practical implications. First, while scholars denote a positive trend in the position and treatment of female athletes and women in racing, the struggle against misogyny has not ended. Although it could be argued that the dominant gender discourse in Formula 1 is increasingly constitutive of more (post) feminist ideas, this does not mean conventional gender ideology and discourse have disappeared altogether or that structures of inequality in the sport have been abolished. The struggle needs to continue but to succeed, it should be a fight of all, including fans, the media, and especially men in positions of power.

Second, the importance of representation and visibility were prominent subjects in Formula 1's gender discourse. Beyond discourse reproduction, therefore, media can play an important role in the fight for gender equality by, for example, creating platforms and content by prominent media where female athletes are offered a spotlight. This would not only help normalise their presence in motorsport but also help them get access to sponsorships and other opportunities.

Third, the analysis revealed that the underlying structures of motorsport and lacking support at the grassroots level of racing are perceived by many as key causes of gender inequality in racing. For the FIA, Formula 1's governing body, then, future efforts towards inclusion and diversity might benefit from an increased focus on these areas. Instead of (only) extra space for female drivers to gain visibility, experience, and sponsorship once they reach the single-seaters level of racing, perhaps similar initiatives could be designed and implemented on the very first level of motorsport: karting. This could increase young girls' participation and increasingly normalise the presence of female athletes on all levels of racing.

5.2. Limitations and future research

This study has a number of limitations. The focus was limited to articles discussing female racers and women in motorsport. Although male drivers and men were included in those to a limited extent, future research could benefit from further analysis of narratives about male drivers in the media to expand the findings of this research with further insights into gendered discourses in motorsport.

Furthermore, the research was limited to English online news and opinion articles from international sports and motorsport media. Future research might consider investigating and

comparing other types of media or media in other languages to complement the findings of the present study.

Finally, the findings offer insight into valuable avenues for future research. Firstly, the media serve as a space for active debate. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic gender discourses do not exist in a vacuum, but rather actively interact with each other. Some articles were written in response to statements of other media or actors, but prominent actors themselves also revisited their own after being faced with criticism. In the present study, articles with original statements, subsequent criticism, and final revision were analysed. However, prominent actors also addressed criticism they received in other spaces, like social media. In more traditional media- like the analysed articles- prominent actors act as primary definers, they are given the authority to shape the narrative about events and issues. Commonly, the same primary definers are offered a platform and it is a one-directional communication, which means the reproduced discourse is rather homogenous in nature and alternative perspectives are excluded. As the present study has observed, traditional media increasingly act as spaces for debate where opposing perspectives conflict. However, the interactive nature of social media allows for this to happen on a much larger scale. Not only credible individuals, but rather anyone with access to online spaces can shape, reproduce, and challenge discourses. Therefore, the academic field might benefit from future research investigating the role of social media in shaping gender discourse (in Formula 1).

Secondly, this thesis has initiated an investigation of patriarchal discourses in Formula 1 whilst distinguishing between more patent and subtle forms of sexism. In light of increased levels of accountability and a general rise in gender equality efforts in racing, it was suggested that conventionally hegemonic gender discourse, which was often reflective of hostile sexism, might be replaced with more subtle forms of sexism. As discussed, this does not always have to be intentional. Gender discourses aiming to advocate and support female drivers were found to reinforce subtle forms of sexism as well. Therefore, future research might benefit from an increased focus on different ways in which sexist ideas are reproduced and reinforced, especially at a time when people are increasingly being held accountable. They may like to sound politically correct while simultaneously reproducing gender stereotypes in more hidden or disguised ways.

In conclusion, patriarchal and sexist ideas are still prevalent in Formula 1 and continue to be reinforced by its media and prominent actors. Yet, the narrative is no longer homogenous. Themes of advocacy for gender equality, female empowerment, and opposition against sexism were prevalent in the mediated gender debate. Therefore, while the race against sexism may seem endless, positions are being gained.

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Appendix A. Codebook as sorted by themes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
<p>Advocacy and Support:</p> <p>clear approval of women’s inclusion in motorsport and active campaigning for improved gender equality.</p>	<p>(Positive)</p> <p>Evaluations of female drivers and -racing series:</p> <p>utterances expressing clear approval of and support for female drivers and -racing series.</p>	<p>-Exclusively female racing series are a good thing because they offer women great opportunities and allow them to progress further in the sport.</p>	<p>“The scheme will open up opportunities for young women who aspire to move up the motorsport ladder” (Duqué, 2018, para. 2).</p>
		<p>-Exclusively female racing series are a good thing because they help establish more gender equality in motorsport.</p>	<p>“W Series will increase [the low number of women in single-seaters series] very significantly in 2019, thereby powerfully unleashing the potential of many more female racing drivers” (Delaney, 2018b, para. 11).</p>
		<p>-Exclusively female racing series offer exciting racing and entertainment.</p>	<p>“The racing I witnessed in person at Miami earlier this year was proper stuff” (Bradley, 2022, para. 4).</p>
		<p>-Exclusively female racing series are not the end goal but rather serve a stepping stone for women up to higher</p>	<p>“W Series is the perfect supplement to help me develop and progress further through the junior motorsport ranks”</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p>disciplines.</p> <p>-Women are able to cope with the physical and mental demands of racing.</p> <p>-Women are able to compete with men in racing on all levels.</p> <p>-Ascribed superiority to women compared to men.</p> <p>-Female success and achievements in</p>	<p>(Noble, 2018b, para. 6).</p> <p>“Of the qualities identified – both physically and mentally – Hinsta Performance CEO says: "There is not one that cannot be reached by a woman” (Francis & Rencken, 2022b, para. 6).</p> <p>"We at W Series firmly believe that female and male racing drivers can compete with one another on equal terms given the same opportunity” (Delaney, 2018b, para. 6).</p> <p>“My opinion is that women are actually stronger mentally than men are. I think we can push ourselves much further than men can” (Van Osten, 2019, para. 7).</p> <p>"Chadwick is likely Britain's fastest</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p>racing.</p> <p>-Outspoken support for (more) women and girls coming into the sport.</p> <p>-Women should be promoted on merit and not as a token gesture.</p>	<p>female driver, having won against boys as a junior and claimed both W Series titles so far” (<i>Drive for change</i>, 2022, What are the hurdles section, para. 3).</p> <p>“We'd be delighted to see more girls coming into the sport; we'd be delighted to see a girl get into Formula 1 and ideally be competitive” (<i>Helmut Marko clarifies</i>, 2019, para. 4-6).</p> <p>“They've got to be fast. This is not tokenism” (Francis, & Rencken, 2022a, para. 21).</p>
	<p>Activism and Accountability: discursive campaigning for improved gender equality in racing in which responsibility is placed with varying actors.</p>	<p>-Recognition of gender inequality.</p> <p>-Outspoken commitment to supporting female drivers and fighting gender inequality.</p>	<p>"There's a severe gender imbalance in motor sport and that's a problem" (Murphy, 2018, para. 9).</p> <p>“The FIA and FOM are committed to greater opportunity for women in the sport” (Parkes, 2022a, para. 9).</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p>-Achieving and fighting for gender equality in racing is a shared responsibility</p> <p>-Call to action</p>	<p>"I think it's up to everyone in terms of responsibility, I think it's absolutely everyone from the team owners, to the marketing managers, to the FIA to female drivers themselves, and male drivers as well supporting them. I think it's all of our responsibility to change that" (<i>How women are tackling barriers</i>, 2023, para. 15).</p> <p>"I'm not suggesting [Formula 1] should bankroll or underwrite the W Series as a business, but it should certainly do all it can to offer further assistance to ensure it doesn't die" (Bradley, 2022, para. 20).</p>
	<p>Criticism / Backlash: expressions of disapproval in reaction to statements or actions of others.</p>	<p>-Backlash against perspectives undermining and underrating women</p>	<p>"Jenson Button criticises Carmen Jorda's claims that women can't reach F1 due to 'physical barrier'" (Morlidge, 2018, para. 1).</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p>-Despite good intentions, exclusively female racing series are a step backwards for women in racing because it segregates them and sends the wrong message.</p> <p>-Exclusively female racing series will do more harm than good to female driver's future prospects.</p>	<p>“What a sad day for motorsport. Those with funding to help female racers are choosing to segregate them as opposed to supporting them. I am deeply disappointed to see such a historic step backwards take place in my life time” (Noble, 2018b, para. 13).</p> <p>“Pushing blindly on for the sake of finding one who is 'good enough' to be the nominated champion rather than genuinely good enough as a driver misses the point. It could cause the overall effort to be dismissed as a gimmick rather than a force for genuine good” (Mitchell, 2018, para. 37).</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
Undermining: discursive strategies that lessen the power	Tokenism: the idea that women are only increasingly involved in motorsport for	-Increased female participation for diversity or other reasons rather than	“Formula 1 wants to ensure we are doing everything we can to create greater diversity

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
and abilities of female drivers and undervalue their skills, achievements, and future prospects.	symbolic reasons in order to give the appearance of gender equality.	<p>being deserving.</p> <p>-Rather than earned based on merit, female drivers are handed opportunities.</p>	<p>and routes into this incredible sport. That is why I am delighted to announce the F1 Academy” (Parkes, 2022b, para. 5 & 6).</p> <p>“Three W Series drivers are to be given a test in F3 machinery in an attempt to promote progression from the championship” (Gale, 2022b, para. 1).</p>
	<p>Timeframe / Prospects: estimation of female drivers’ prospects and possible progression over time.</p>	<p>-A woman in Formula 1 is a long-term ambition and will not happen soon.</p> <p>-The focus is/should be on the next generation.</p> <p>-Lower racing series are the main goal for women, F1 seems far</p>	<p>“Getting a competitive woman into F1 was always going to be a long-term ambition” (Noble, 2022a, Making headlines section, para. 6)</p> <p>“What you need is the seven year old girls to say 'I want to go karting like the boys do', and then start off being pari passu with the boys” (Noble, 2022a, W Series ambitions section, para. 10).</p> <p>“Our goal is to see female drivers on the F3 grid in the next two</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p>away.</p> <p>-A need to be realistic about women in racing.</p>	<p>to three years, and for them to quickly challenge for points and podiums” (<i>Formula 1 launches F1 Academy</i>, 2022, para. 15).</p> <p>“Realistically speaking, I don't see - unless there will be something that will be like some sort of meteorite coming into the earth - a girl coming into Formula 1 in the next five years. That is very unlikely, I need to be realistic” (Noble, 2022a, para. 4).</p>
	<p>(Negative) Evaluations of female drivers and racing series: utterances expressing clear disapproval of female drivers and - racing series.</p>	<p>-Female drivers need help.</p> <p>-Current female drivers will not reach F1.</p> <p>-Women cannot compete equally with men in racing.</p>	<p>“[Female drivers] need all the help they can get” (Bradley, 2022, para. 4).</p> <p>“At the moment I don't see any female who could be competitive in Formula 1” (<i>Helmut Marko clarifies</i>, 2019, para. 4).</p> <p>"Even with the help of modern driver aids such as power</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p data-bbox="834 689 1034 768">-Female drivers' failures.</p> <p data-bbox="834 1043 1099 1173">-Exclusively female racing series create sub-par competitions.</p> <p data-bbox="834 1697 1106 1883">-Exclusively female racing series cause stagnation rather than progression.</p>	<p data-bbox="1134 237 1401 618">steering, Marko said that he felt women would be at too much of a physical disadvantage to compete fairly with men" (Lewin, 2019, para. 3).</p> <p data-bbox="1134 689 1390 972">"IndyCar racer Pippa Mann, who has struggled to keep her career afloat in the US" (Duqué, 2018, para. 9).</p> <p data-bbox="1134 1043 1409 1630">"Part of the reason [W Series'] architects believe it is needed is that there are no major female talents around. If there were, they'd be in, or be close to, F1. Therefore, is forming a grid of these sub-elite drivers really a good idea?" (Mitchell, 2018, para. 13).</p> <p data-bbox="1134 1697 1406 2078">"And if you take away the middle rungs of the ladder, then you've got very little chance of getting to the top anyway" (Bradley, 2022, para. 19).</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data example
		<p>-Uncertainty about exclusively-female racing series' usefulness.</p>	<p>"Indeed, as it nears the end of its third year, no W Series racer has yet to secure a full-time place in F3 and F2 to help their aspirations towards a grand prix seat" (Noble, 2022a, W Series ambitions section, para. 5).</p>
	<p>Disproportionate expectations and requirements: outlined requirements and expectations that female drivers need to meet to be deemed capable of competing with men in Formula 1, which are vastly different from those imposed on their male peers.</p>	<p>-To be allowed in F1, female drivers are expected to match the sport's elite.</p> <p>-A search for the first female F1 champion.</p>	<p>"There are females competing in the current W Series who are capable of making the switch to Formula 1, but thinks anyone who does will need to be able to match the likes of Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen" (Macdonald, 2019, para. 1).</p> <p>"David Coulthard is adamant that his More Than Equal initiative – aimed at finding and developing the first female F1 World Champion" (Francis, & Rencken, 2022a, para. 2).</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
<p>Barriers: conceptualizations of the main obstacles responsible for gender inequality in racing and a lack of women in Formula 1.</p>	<p>Visibility and Representation: how and to what degree women are (re)present(ed) in racing and its media.</p>	<p>-Lack of female representation and role models.</p> <p>-Poor visibility/representation of women in other key roles.</p> <p>-Media representation perpetuating gender ideas and stereotypes and affecting women's position, aspirations, and treatment in the sport.</p>	<p>“So, given most young people become particularly interested in a sport by finding a story they can relate to, it's harder to inspire young girls” (Mitchell, 2018 para. 5).</p> <p>"This lack of visibility in terms of a broad range of roles offered little hope for a woman aspiring to become involved in F1, be it as a driver or any other job” (Francis, 2021, para. 3).</p> <p>“It is statements like that that I guess women or girls are probably confronted with when they are growing up and sharing their dreams. "Sitting at breakfast saying 'I want to be a racing driver,' the father might have just read that statement and make it clear to her that 'but you like other things, why not focus on other things'</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
			and then they do focus on other things and drop racing or the idea” (Parkes & Hall, 2022, para. 5).
	<p>The underlying structures/systems of racing: the set of interrelated procedures and principles on which motorsport is built that benefits men and disadvantages women.</p>	<p>-Systemic problems of a male-dominated world.</p> <p>-Lack of funding/money for female drivers.</p> <p>-Lack of nurturing young female talent.</p>	<p>“So we need to change as well, not only in helping developing talent, but we need to change the mentality in these feeder formulas, which then do put let’s say a physical preference towards certain size and physically developed men” (Noble, 2022b para. 16).</p> <p>"Whilst the women don't get the sponsorship and the financial support that the men get, this cycle that we've had for the last 45 years of no woman being in Formula 1, that's all going to continue” (White, 2022a, para. 29).</p> <p>“A failure to identify and support female talent as early as male talent” (Francis, &</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
		<p data-bbox="831 387 1094 517">-Lacking support and opportunities for female drivers.</p> <p data-bbox="831 837 1114 967">-A lack of involvement of young girls in karting/racing.</p>	<p data-bbox="1141 237 1406 315">Rencken, 2022b para. 8).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 387 1406 768">“A lack of funding and opportunities just a few of the obstacles” (<i>Drive for change</i>, 2022, What are the hurdles for female F1 hopefuls? section, para. 2).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 837 1406 1272">“It’s getting them involved in the first place that’s the problem and that is not necessarily because of a lack of interest in sport” (Mitchell, 2018, para. 35).</p>
	<p data-bbox="534 1296 810 1576">Physicality of racing: the physical demands of racing and Formula 1 particularly and women’s inability to cope with this.</p>	<p data-bbox="831 1296 1094 1375">-Women are weak by nature.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1749 1082 1827">-F1/racing is too physical for women.</p>	<p data-bbox="1141 1296 1390 1682">“300km/h and have a wheel-to-wheel fight then brutality is part of it. I do not know if that’s in the female nature” (Lewin, 2019, para. 2).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 1749 1406 2078">“Even with the help of modern driver aids such as power steering, Marko said that he felt women would be at too much of a physical</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
			disadvantage to compete fairly with men” (Lewin, 2019, para. 3).
	<p>Personal inadequacy: female drivers’ shortcomings as the core of their absence in racing, rather than gender inequality.</p>	<p>-A lack of talent is to blame for women’s absence in F1, because talent trumps gender.</p> <p>-Current female drivers are not good enough for F1.</p> <p>-Denial of gender inequality.</p>	<p>“If the talent is strong enough, it will permeate its way into Formula 1, because, you know, we’re all very selfish individuals that we want the best drivers, regardless of background, gender, etcetera” (Gale, (2022a, para. 9).</p> <p>“There is nobody in a position to be competitive in Formula 1 at the moment” (<i>Helmut Marko clarifies</i>, 2019, para. 7).</p> <p>“There are no barriers to young female talent from competing alongside male drivers in top-level motorsport” (Gale, (2022a, para. 1).</p>
<p>Solutions: conceptualizations about what is needed to improve</p>	<p>Fundamental restructuring: dismantling and reforming of the set of</p>	<p>-Deconstructing a male-focused / sexist mindset.</p>	<p>“Seek through data and research to break down misconceptions about women racers,</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
gender equality in racing and for women to reach Formula 1.	interrelated procedures and principles on which motorsport is built that benefits men and disadvantages women.	<p data-bbox="831 589 1018 674">-Technological changes.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1043 1086 1227">-Increased focus and support on the grassroots level of racing.</p> <p data-bbox="831 2051 1118 2085">-Creation of alternative</p>	<p data-bbox="1141 237 1412 517">such as lack of strength, aggression, or willingness to put themselves in harm’s way” (Allen, 2022, para. 12).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 589 1412 976">“Speaking to our technical [department], every single-seater car has to accommodate both sides. It’s not rocket science” (Noble, 2022b para. 8).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 1043 1412 1984">“The fundamentals of what is needed to make the breakthrough to F1 are: better talent detection at an early stage and then funding and other professional support for a defined program through to F1. This is what most of the household name male drivers from Lewis Hamilton to Lando Norris have benefitted from one way or another” (Allen, 2022, para. 3).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 2051 1382 2085">“That’s why an all-</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
		<p data-bbox="834 237 1102 315">spaces and routes into the sport for women.</p> <p data-bbox="834 1346 1027 1424">-Breaking down barriers.</p> <p data-bbox="834 2051 1070 2085">-Raising awareness.</p>	<p data-bbox="1144 237 1406 1272">new all-female single-seater motor racing series is required – W Series – to establish a competitive and constructive motorsport habitat in which our drivers will be able to equip themselves with the necessary skill-set eventually to move on up to existing high-level mainstream racing series and compete with the best male drivers on equal terms” (Delaney, 2018b para. 8).</p> <p data-bbox="1144 1346 1406 1984">“Series need to remove barriers to entry, such as by lowering the cost of entry and simultaneously showcase the other opportunities available within motorsport such as in engineering” (<i>How women are tackling</i>, 2023, para. 13).</p> <p data-bbox="1144 2051 1390 2085">“There’s a long way</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
			to go on that and also in terms of educating male journalists and content creators about the challenges that female competitors face” (<i>How women are tackling</i> , 2023, para. 19).
	<p>Inclusion and equal opportunity: providing equal access to opportunities and resources for female drivers to increase their presence and prospects in racing</p>	<p>-Inclusion of women in traditional support and sponsorship programs</p> <p>-Increased access to facilities that help drivers improve.</p> <p>-Increased female participation in driver and other key roles.</p>	<p>“(…) and other professional support for a defined program through to F1. This is what most of the household name male drivers from Lewis Hamilton to Lando Norris have benefitted from one way or another” (Allen, 2022, para. 3).</p> <p>“That track time and that support network is going to be valuable for them to get the best out of themselves and really try and make the step up the ladder” (Van Osten, 2023, para. 6).</p> <p>“The especially crucial aspect of that was not just in putting a spotlight on</p>

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Data examples
		<p data-bbox="831 987 1091 1070">-Increased visibility / representation.</p> <p data-bbox="831 1397 1038 1525">-Maximize opportunities for female drivers.</p>	<p data-bbox="1141 237 1398 920">the talents of female drivers, but in highlighting various job roles within motorsport, from engineers to commentators and everything in-between” (Francis, (2022a , W Series' impact on visibility for women in Motorsport section, para. 4).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 994 1406 1323">“An inspiration for girls growing up seeing someone winning and thinking 'I want to do that” (Noble, 2018a, para. 9).</p> <p data-bbox="1141 1397 1406 1778">“It is crucial at this moment to give the maximum possibility for women to come into Formula 1” (Parkes & Hall, 2022, What did Domenicali say? section, para. 2).</p>

Appendix B. Overview of prominent actors quoted in the articles

Actor nr.	Sex	Age	Job / Role	Status
1	Female	25	W Series champion & Williams F1 development driver	Currently active
2	Male	83	Former F1 champion	Retired
3	Male	43	Former F1 champion	Retired
4	Male	35	Former F1 champion	Retired
5	Male	48	Alpine F1 team chief executive	Currently active
6	Female	22	Euro F3 racer	Currently active
7	Female	39	Former IndyCar driver	Retired
8	Female	69	Former F1 driver	Retired
9	Male	37	Former F1 driver & NTT IndyCar Series	Retired from F1, active in IndyCar
10	Female	25	Extreme E driver	Currently active
11	-	-	Formula 1	-
12	Male	41	Formula 1 champion	Currently active
13	Male	33	Alpha Romeo F1 team driver	Currently active
14	Male	51	Mercedes F1 team boss	Currently active
15	Male	-	F2 & F3 CEO	Currently active
16	Male	61	FIA president	Currently active
17	Male	92	Former chief executive of the Formula One Group	Retired
18	Male	52	Former F1 driver	Retired
19	Female	35	Former Lotus development driver and FIA's Women In Motorsport commission member	Retired from driving, active commission member
20	Male	58	F1 CEO	Currently active
21	Male	38	F1 champion	Currently active
22	Female	30	GP3 driver & Sauber F1 team development driver	Currently active
23	Female	37	GT driver	Currently active
24	Female	40	Managing director F1 academy	Currently active
25	Male	63	Managing Director of Commercial Operations at Formula 1	Currently active
26	Male	49	Red Bull F1 team boss	Currently active
27	Male	80	Red Bull F1 team advisor & owner	Currently active
28	Female	20	W Series driver	Currently active

Actor nr.	Sex	Age	Job / Role	Status
29	Female	31	W Series driver	Currently active
30	Female	30	W Series driver	Currently active
31	Female	28	W Series driver	Currently active
32	Female	29	W Series driver	Currently active
33	Female	-	W Series founder & CEO	Currently active