

Women in the F1 Academy:

Reflexive thematic analysis on gender representation in feature articles of F1 Academy's official website

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores gender representation in the media coverage of the F1 Academy feature articles. Media representation plays an essential role in how the public views and what they define as norms in society, most often by reifying traditional gender roles, and for that reason, this research examines how the official website of the F1 Academy's feature articles represents female drivers and team members and what is revealed about their live in motorsport as women. The research question to be responded is "how do feature articles on the F1 Academy's official website portray female drivers and team members?". With reflexive thematic analysis by Braun & Clark (2006, 2020), this study analyzes articles from 20th of March 2024 to 20th of December 2024, that include interviews, driver profiles, behind the scenes, and career reflections which were all sourced from F1 Academy's official website. By iterative theme development and inductive coding, five themes are uncovered and developed: 1) Evolving pathways of women's participation in motorsports, 2) Family and male mentorship in the F1 Academy, 3) Identity, aesthetics and expression as a driver, 4) Strategy to change & collective belonging, and 5) Optimism, progress & the future. The findings show that despite F1 Academy's media coverage showing alterations in visibility and legitimacy of women in the sport, gendered framing persists. Female drivers and team members are frequently depicted through narratives of relational support, particularly highlighting the influence of male family members; through aesthetic and stylistic choices, matters that do not directly correlate to racing; and through emotional storytelling that foregrounds personal struggles and triumphs. Secondly, symbolic victories and media exposure are often valued more than actual visible structural change, making genuine inclusion of women in a male-dominated sport difficult to achieve. The thesis speaks to the endemic tension between visibility and equity, exemplifying how increasing numbers in media does not always eliminate prevalent stereotypes. In so doing, critically analyzing the presentation of female subjects in the official media of the F1 Academy, the study provides relevant insights into how gendered stories are negotiated within contemporary motorsports media, offering a foundation for future research and reflection on how (motor)sporting institutions would create more meaningful forms of inclusion through media representation without resorting to stereotypes.

KEYWORDS: *Gender representation, F1 Academy, Sports media, Reflexive thematic analysis, Motorsport, Feminist media studies, Gender stereotypes.*

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1. Introduction

Motorsports have long been viewed as a hyper-masculine domain, where risk, aggression, and technical skill were framed as inherently male attributes (Scharff, 1992, pp.6-7; Sturm, 2021, p.120), hence women's involvement was limited to peripheral or even ornamental roles, in a way that reinforced the idea that racing was simply not "for them" (Howe, 2022, p.456). Figures like Maria Teresa de Filippis¹ and Lella Lombardi² briefly tried to challenge norms in the 50s and 70s, however, institutional barriers, including lack of sponsorship, media attention, and mentorship, kept the field male-dominated (Howe, 2022; Scharff, 1992). Against this idea, the launch of F1 Academy marks the beginning of a new racing championship, but this time for women. The F1 Academy first launched in 2023, as stated in F1 Academy's official website (F1 Academy, 2025, Rules and Regulations), representing an initiative in motorsports aimed at increasing the representation and participation of women. As a women's-only racing series under the Formula 1 umbrella, it provides a platform for female drivers and team members to receive professional training and gain visibility while progressing through the ranks of motorsport to eventually reach Formula 1, the highest level in the "formulas". Despite its potential for increasing visibility, the media play a role in shaping the public perception, especially regarding gender roles within the sport (Bruce, T., 2015, p. 364), and for that reason this study aims to investigate how gendered themes are woven into narrative structures and the content of the feature articles published by the F1 Academy media team. The F1 Academy initiative is significant not only because it brings potential to increase career opportunities for women but also because it has the potential to challenge traditional norms in motorsport.

This thesis investigates how the mentioned feature articles (driver profiles, interviews, behind-the-scenes, or updates on their racing careers) portray women and the themes related to gender representation that emerge within this coverage, therefore, the research question is: "how do feature articles on the F1 Academy's official website portray female drivers and team members?", which is explored through the following sub questions: a) what recurring themes emerge in the media coverage of female drivers and team members in the F1 Academy feature articles? a) How do the media discuss their athletic and career achievements in relation to their

¹ Maria Teresa de Filippis was the first woman to ever race in a Formula 1 Grand Prix on May 18th, 1958, in Monaco. Her nickname was "Pilotino", more commonly known as "little pilot" because of her height (Females in Motorsport, n.d., paras. 1-2).

² Lella Lombardi was the first ever woman to score championship points in Formula 1 (half a point), in 1975 at the Spanish Grand Prix (Females in Motorsport, 2023, para. 1).

gender? and, lastly, c) What do these portrayals reveal about gender representation in motorsport? The stakes of this investigation extend beyond motorsport, because the way women are portrayed in the media has measurable implications for the access of women across all sports (Cooky et al., 2015; Kane, 1996). As women's participation in motorsports remains relatively low compared to the male counterparts, mainly when referring to drivers (Matthews & Pike, 2016, p.1534), initiatives like the F1 Academy are important in shaping future perceptions of women's roles in the field, however, the media often reinforce traditional gender roles through their representations, either by under-representing female athletes or by using stereotypical portrayals that emphasize their gender over their athletic or technical ability (Cooky et al., 2015, p.277). As visibility often precedes legitimacy (Tuchman, 1978), examining the framing of women in the F1 Academy allows for a deeper understanding of the social construction of gender in elite spaces like motorsports. This research is relevant to society because it examines how public perceptions of women in motorsports are impacted by media coverage of the F1 Academy, and by understanding the potential gendered narratives that emerge, this thesis can contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion about how media representations impact women's opportunities, visibility, and legitimacy in sports. Moreover, with increasing public scrutiny around gender equity in sports, insights from this thesis supports more equitable practices in both coverage and career paths for women in motorsport.

The analysis draws on feminist media studies, postfeminist theories (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), framing theory (Entman, 1993; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007), and other relevant topics. Academics have studied the representation of athletes in the media, drawing attention to problems including gendered stereotypes, underrepresentation, and the marginalization of women's sports (Cooky et al., 2015; Kane, 1996; Koivula, 1999). Nonetheless, there is also a lack of study on women in the F1 Academy more specifically, making this gap particularly interesting considering the F1 Academy's novelty and its potential to reshape existent gendered perceptions. This thesis argues that while the F1 Academy's official website increases the visibility of female drivers and team members, it continues to frame them through subtle gendered representations that blend empowerment with traditional femininity. As the F1 Academy continues to grow its presence, and increase its reach to Formula 1 events, studying its media representation is essential for understanding how these representations are constructed in an era where public discourse on gender, sports and power all dialogue together (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

It is found that women are presented as competitors, role models for other women and girls, agents of change, and their visibility is positioned as both an achievement and a means of encouragement for others. Simultaneously, these portrayals evoke topics such as emotionality,

appearance, and relational support, besides placing responsibility for change on individuals rather than the institution. The representation of collective belonging and male allyship show more inclusion, however, the access to certain positions or opportunities remain harder to reach or achievable only under certain conditions. The findings demonstrate that symbolic progress exists in the F1 Academy, although paired with still existing gender inequalities that are reflected in women's participation in the sport.

To address these questions, the study first outlines the theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis, followed by a description of the research design and method of choice used to engage with the data (reflexive thematic analysis) and the results of that analysis are presented thematically and interpreted through the lens of the literature review chapter. Finally, the last chapter is the conclusion of the results, considering points such as implications, limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

This study draws upon several theoretical approaches in order to explore if there are gendered representations of drivers and team members in the F1 Academy's feature articles. Central to this analysis are references linked to feminist media theories, gender representation in sports media, framing theory, and post-feminism. The chosen feminist theories, particularly those concerned with the intersection of gender and power, allow for an examination of how women and men are portrayed differently by the media. These theories provide the framework for understanding the ways in which media narratives shape and/or maintain societal views of gender. Framing theory is employed to explore how media outlets structure and present the narratives around male and female drivers, highlighting the specific frames that reinforce gender biases and stereotypes. Through the integration of these theoretical lenses, this study seeks to offer a nuanced analysis of how gender is constructed and represented in the media coverage of women in the F1 Academy.

a) Gender norms, stereotyping and post feminism

Focusing more in depth on media and gender norms, scholars like Gallagher (2013) view media representation as a key mechanism in maintaining and also challenging social norms around gender, and "despite apparent changes, media images and representations intertwine with political and social ideologies to reaffirm relatively stable positions in society" (p.27). More particularly, Gallagher (2013) considers that while women may be visible in the media, this visibility often reflects biases of those who set the media agenda, consequently reinforcing stereotypes rather than seeking to combat them (p.23), hence the media construct gendered identities and represent women in ways that often prioritize focus on traditional notions of femininity, sometimes overshadowing their abilities and competencies. Angela McRobbie, a cultural theorist, describes this as "disarticulation" – a process which through its insistent focus on female individualism and consumerism, unpicks the seams of connection between groups of women who might find common cause" (McRobbie, 2009, pp.26-27). This is especially evident in male-dominated fields, such as sports, where women's roles are frequently framed in ways that prioritize their gender over their skills and although significant changes have occurred in global media paradigms, accompanied by the emergence of increasingly complex approaches for media analysis and theoretical development, the core concerns and issues persist unchanged, namely, the articulation of values, the construction of identity, the dynamics of power, and the actual process of representation (Gallagher, 2013, p.23). Complementing this, Rosalind Gill (2007) builds upon postfeminist media sensibility and the contradictions within these portrayals, where empowerment coexists with commodification and subtle regulation of femininity (p.149). Together, these two authors help

reveal how F1 Academy articles enable or, on the contrary, constrain women's identities within the contemporary landscape.

Koivula (1999) asserts that media has a significant role in shaping the public's view of sports and athletes by presenting gendered representations through various formats such as television and print media – a process in which the framing affects how audiences understand and internalize the gender roles associated with different sports (p.590). The representation of women in motorsport media can thus be seen as a form of gender construction through "the experience of sport, and the beliefs and values" (p.590), where traditional gender expectations are reinforced, but depend on the context of coverage. Given the male-dominated nature of these sports, it is essential to explore how female drivers in the F1 Academy are framed: are they depicted as breaking traditional gender roles or stereotyped with emphasis on femininity over athletic ability? It is also notable to mention that the media shape and reinforce societal norms about femininity and masculinity, often portraying certain sports, like figure skating, gymnastics, and synchronized swimming, as inherently feminine, thereby perpetuating gender expectations in sports (Koivula, 1995, p.590). In fact, this discussion of gendered sport divisions is particularly relevant when considering motorsport's historical association with masculinity, which is conventionally framed through values such as physical strength, aggression, and risk-taking traits traditionally associated with men. The media framing these drivers as anomalies (Pflugfelder, 2009) reinforce or challenge these expectations of femininity and masculinity. According to Koivula (1999),

References to women athletes more typically employ expressions of aesthetic appeal such as 'graceful' and/or focus on femininity or lack of it. Male athletes are generally represented in a favorable vein as manly, strong mentally and physically, and forceful. Women athletes are instead presented according to cultural stereotypes which associate femininity with weakness, dependency, emotion, and submissiveness. Women are also often framed in terms of their social position, for example, as girlfriends, wives, or mothers. (p.591)

Koivula's analysis highlights the widespread tendency of the media to frame women athletes in terms of traditional gender roles rather than focusing on their athletic skill and achievements. This is in alignment with the framing theory and feminist perspectives, where the media often attach female athletes to stereotypical roles that undermine their athletic prowess, which can be manifested through representations of female drivers as either exceptions or outliers

within this predominantly male field. By focusing more on their personal lives or physical appearance rather than their driving abilities, the media perpetuate these stereotypes. For female drivers in the F1 Academy, examining whether their media representations focus more on their gender or their skill as racers is central to understanding how gender roles are negotiated within the motorsport context. Koivula (1999) also suggests that the majority of previous studies on media and sports have focused on specific events or regions (p.592), often overlooking niche or emerging sports like motorsport, making the F1 Academy an important area of study, as it provides an opportunity to analyze how gender dynamics are portrayed in a sport where women are often underrepresented. Therefore, this research aims to fill a gap in the existing body of literature. Although real-world dynamics and scholarly research indicate trends of some evolution, men remain predominant in racing, occupying most positions as drivers, pit crew members, team ownerships, and managerial roles (Matthews & Pike, 2016, p.1); this observation about the underrepresentation of women in elite motorsports represents the systemic barriers and reality that exist in motorsports. It is essential, therefore, to understand if the F1 Academy drivers and team members are framed solely as women in a male-dominated sport, or if there are any attempts to acknowledge the complexities of their identities, as the underrepresentation of women can perpetuate gendered assumptions and stereotypes in media portrayals of female drivers and other female professionals in the field.

b) Performing gender and building a career in motorsports

In Kochanek et al.'s work (2021) it is explained that gender is not something people are innately born with, but rather a social construct shaped and reshaped through everyday discourse, cultural norms, behaviors, and interactions (p.2). This becomes particularly relevant for the case of motorsport and F1 Academy, as the media framing of female drivers in the F1 Academy either reinforces or challenges traditional gender expectations - whether women are framed conforming to femininity versus if they are framed as defying gender norms to assert their professional identities as capable athletes. Furthermore, gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 2004) is a concept that is crucial for understanding how these women's identities are both shaped by and contribute to the gendered narratives of motorsport. Still according to Butler (1990), gender is not a fixed biological fact, it is a social identity performed through repeated acts, language, and behaviors; these performances then give the impression that gender identities are natural, although they are constructed within specific cultural and societal contexts (p.11). In this sense, media representations are not just reflections of gender but are active in constructing and performing gender roles - social constructivist's view of gender "puts forth [...] our understanding of what it means to be 'masculine' or 'feminine'" (Kochanek et al., 2021, p.2) and one example of this are

comments like the following: “[...] there shouldn’t be any pink on [the car] ... so, I don’t advertise I’m a female because I do get that reaction from people and feel as though they might take me a little more serious.” and “You break like a girl. I’m not sure this sport is for you; don’t take it personally, it’s not in your DNA. You’re a bit too timid for this.” (p.5). The dismissive attitudes and comments towards female drivers, including criticism of their femininity or physicality, strengthen the notion of gender discrimination in the sport. That being said, it is important to study whether the articles represented F1 Academy women as “performing” femininity in stereotypical ways through the emphasis of their appearance, emotions, or relationships, or if they are primarily shown as capable, competent athletes.

Additionally, the findings in Kochanek et al.’s (2021) research showed the importance of the following themes for the success of women in racing. The first one consisted in the family and fatherly influence on the female driver to get into motorsports - this theme resonates with the broader understanding of gendered power dynamics in motorsport, where women’s participation is often framed through their relationship with men, either as fathers, mentors, or male competitors, and this thesis explores whether the media coverage of women in the F1 Academy emphasizes these gendered family dynamics, or if these drivers are portrayed more as independent, competent athletes breaking free from traditional gender roles; secondly, the existence of potential marginalizing beliefs/behaviors and existing institutional barriers; the navigation of constraints, in negotiating “gender and their (dis)empowering effects” (p.5); and lastly, the promotion of women in motorsports (Kochanek et al., 2021, p.5).

A significant part of motorsport culture, including its fan base, represents female drivers as having a more feminine approach to their role, implying that they are perceived as having a different and often lesser connection to vehicles compared to male drivers, which is a view reflected in the observation: “People will be more forgiving for a guy that goes out and tries to be fast and wrecks and say, ‘he was just trying to be fast’. But a girl that wrecks because she’s trying to be fast, there’s criticism – ‘she sucks’” (p.6). This quote illustrates the double standard that female drivers encounter, where their failures are more frequently attributed to gender right rather than to their skills or determination and despite those perceptions, drivers such as Danica Patrick likely manage their vehicles using the same physical techniques as their male counterparts (Pflugfelder, 2009, p.423). Moreover, athletes have explicitly expressed that they don’t want to be singled out or seen differently because of their gender, and when they make a mistake, it is solely because they made a mistake and not because they are women and, supposedly, less capable (Kochanek et al., 2021, p.5). Besides, female athletes are often viewed as embodying the entire group of women, leading to their experiences, both personal and performance related, to be dismissed or

undermined due to their gender only (Kochanek et al., 2021, p.6); hence, it is fair to deduce that the pressure on one woman to represent all women is another issue in the study of gender in motorsport. Female drivers in the F1 Academy potentially face similar challenges in being framed as representatives of their gender. Women in motorsports are often seen as anomalies because of their deviation from traditional gender norms related to physicality, aggression, and risk-taking (Pflugfelder, 2009, p.412). Pflugfelder (2009) provides a foundational analysis of how gender is framed in motorsport discourse (historical marginalization of women in motorsports, their portrayal in media, and the discursive barriers they face in being recognized as legitimate competitors), which is essential for understanding women's representation in the F1 Academy. Although intentional negative portrayals of female drivers by media outlets are rare to see, many remain influenced by an inescapable discourse shaped by the dominant 'common sense ideology of mass culture' that frames these women as inherently different, conforming to traditional/stereotypical notions of femininity, and in some cases perceived as 'intimidating' (Pflugfelder, 2009, p.412, as cited in Sloop, 2005, p.193). This quote aligns with concerns that even if F1 Academy's media portrayal is not discriminatory, it can still reinforce stereotypes through subtle framing techniques, such as emphasizing female drivers' emotions, appearance, or their "unique" status as women in a male-dominated space, which will be one of the focus points of the analysis.

In many racing series, women are often seen in roles that support male drivers, usually positioned in the stands or garages. Besides, the most typically portrayed way of women in this context is as the wives or girlfriends of the male competitors and their tasks generally entail observing the race, provide encouragement, and occasionally speak to the media about their partner's performance (p.414). This provides a critical foundation for analyzing not just female drivers in F1 Academy but also female team members (the engineers, mechanics and strategists) who have been historically ignored in media coverage. However, is there a possible shift in sight for motorsport media? "Walking around the pits, she was a female, [...] strapped in the car, she was a driver" (Pflugfelder, 2009, p.421). Some media outlets do in fact treat female drivers as just straight up drivers, rather than *female* drivers, which represents a positive shift, so it is essential to see whether F1 Academy media coverage follows this rhetoric. Moreover, Monisha Kaltenborn was the first female team principal of Sauber from 2012 to 2017, and Claire Williams was Williams F1 team's deputy-principal alongside her father, Frank Williams, from 2015 to 2020 (Sturm, 2021, p.122), showing that leadership roles for women have been increasing lately. Along the same lines, Susie Wolff's journey as team principal of Venturi Formula E and later as managing director of the F1 Academy shows both progress and ongoing challenges for women in leadership within motorsport.

Building upon this foundation, recent scholarship stresses the evolving gender dynamics in sports media. Kochanek et al. (2021) consider how the actions of female racecar drivers circumvent and counteract the meta cultural and structural constraints of a male-dominated sport (pp.4-5) while also positioning themselves as professionals, whereas Sturm (2021) interrogates the hyper-masculinized constructions of male drivers, alongside the objectifying constructions of women that accompany such narratives (p.120). Sturm's (2021) analysis of gender roles in Formula One provides critical insights into how women have historically been positioned within the sport, reinforcing the "Formula One paradox" - a dynamic in which male drivers are framed as risk-taking heroes while women remain in supporting roles: "With men as the alleged bravado-infused and risk-taking drivers, the technical experts, the team leaders, and as the owners and controllers of the sport, the relatively few women in Formula One have overwhelmingly been cast in a supporting role." (p.120). This paradox not only reflects a persistent gender division of roles within motorsport, but it also reveals some mechanisms that help sustain such hierarchies. Hence, a thorough examination of these patterns is necessary to inform and support ongoing efforts to reshape gender dynamics and inequalities in motor sports media representation.

c) Inclusivity, visibility and framing of gender in sports media

In addition to this body of research, Næss and Tjønndal (2021) address developments/approaches toward gender inclusivity, providing a better lens to examine media representations in motorsport and attempting to shift this sector towards an equitable environment given the nature of the sport. The authors highlight the ingrained masculine culture in motorsport, where aggression, risk-taking, and competitiveness are framed as inherently male characteristics (Næss & Tjønndal, 2021, as cited in Kennedy, 2000; Pfugfelder, 2009; Shackleford, 1999; Sturm, 2011, p.82). Næss and Tjønndal (2021) examine different gender initiatives in motorsport, particularly Susie Wolff's involvement in *Girls on Track* and the creation of the *W Series*. Susie Wolff was an ambassador for *Girls on Track* and had already founded *Dare to be Different* in partnership with the British Motor Sports Association (now Motorsport UK). As a former professional driver that took part in the Tourenwagen Meisterschaft (DTM) and worked as a test driver for Williams Formula 1 team, Wolff retired in 2015 but returned to the motorsport world as a team principal of the Venturi Formula E team in 2018. Given her achievements, it made sense for the FIA to consult her on how to expand the *Girls on Track* initiative (Næss & Tjønndal, 2021, p.87). Susie Wolff has been a key figure in advocating for greater female representation in motorsport, using her platform to push for systemic changes. In fact, she became the first woman to race in

Formula One since 1992 during a practice session at the Silverstone circuit, at the British GP weekend, in 2014 and, more recently in 2023, became F1 Academy's managing director³.

So, one more championship emerged, *W Series* ('W' stands for women), pretty much at the same time as *Girls on Track - Dare to be Different* was launched (Næss and Tjønndal, 2021, p.87). The *W Series* was a highly visible gender initiative aimed at increasing female participation at a professional level. However, it faced criticism for segregating female racers rather than integrating them into existing motorsport structures and "as such, [W-Series] became a 'competitor' to the *Girls on Track – Dare to be Different* initiative, also in terms of the best way forward to decelerate gender inequality in motorsport" (p.88). This raises an important question: does the F1 Academy actually represent meaningful social innovation, or is it another gender-segregated initiative that does little to challenge the structural barriers women face? The analysis of the articles of the F1 Academy will be crucial in determining its impact, if it is depicted as a "stepping stone" to F1, this could legitimize its existence, but if it is framed as a separate category for women, it potentially risks reinforcing gender segregation in motorsport. Næss & Tjønndal (2021) acknowledge that gender initiatives in motorsport have indeed led to incremental social change, even if they have not completely dismantled structural inequalities (p.94).

Furthermore, gender representation in sports media has been a significant area of study, particularly the ways in which women athletes are often marginalized, neglected or purely reduced to their gender, rather than their sporting prowess. In the 1996 paper, Kane explores how media coverage of female athletes often focuses on their physical appearance, relationships, or emotional states rather than primarily on their skills or accomplishments. By focusing on gendered representations, Cooky, Messner, and Musto (2015) analyze how women's sports are often excluded or misrepresented in mainstream sports media, reinforcing stereotypes about female athletes' lack of competitiveness (p.278) and Harris (2013) contributes to this discussion by pointing out how gender stereotypes are frequently used in media portrayals of women in sports to cast doubt on their ability, competence, credibility, and legitimacy as athletes (p.137; pp.149-150).

Another significant theoretical approach in this topic is the framing theory, first put forth by Entman (1993) and then developed by Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007). According to Entman (1993), framing is a technique/ process that modifies the meaning of a problem by highlighting some elements and downplaying others; media sources then use framing to choose, organize, and display information, which influences how viewers see and comprehend certain events or people. As an example, a female driver might be commonly referred as either a trailblazer or a role model

³ As stated by RacingNews365 (n.d.).

but the narrative can change based on how her accomplishment is interpreted, such as if her driving prowess is in fact highlighted or whether her gender is shown as a barrier to overcome. In order to fully understand how feature articles in the F1 Academy shape the narratives and, in turn, the audience's perception of them, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) elaborate on the framing process by highlighting the fact that frames can affect not only what people think but also how they think about an issue (p.11).

Julia Cook's (2018) concept of imagined futures (p.45) explores how media present realities and construct visions of possible futures, infused with hope, risk, and uncertainty. Her framework also emphasizes that gender narratives are not static; they shape expectations, aspirations, and anxieties around what is possible or not for individuals or groups, particularly marginalized ones. In the context of the F1 Academy, this theory complements framing theory and enriches feminist media theories by foregrounding the interplay of hope and risk in gendered portrayals in sports media. How a topic is presented can shape how people/ audiences interpret and understand it (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.11) - this is a crucial concept while analyzing how women in the F1 Academy are portrayed - if the coverage emphasizes gender-based narratives (e.g., women proving themselves in a male-dominated sport) rather than purely performance-related narratives (e.g., a competitive feeder series to F3), it can shape how audiences perceive the legitimacy of the F1 Academy and its drivers. The concept of "framing" refers to the ways in which journalists and communicators present information in a manner that aligns with the pre-existing mental frameworks of their audience - this is a macroconstruct perspective (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.12) -, meaning that the way motorsports media frames the F1 Academy can reinforce or challenge societal beliefs about gender roles in elite racing. So, ultimately if coverage reinforces traditional narratives (e.g., women overcoming adversity, female racers as exceptions, etc.), it highlights gender difference rather than integration. On the other hand, if the media present female drivers in the same way as male counterparts, such as focusing on racecraft, results, and competition rather than gender identity, it signals actual progress toward equal representation. On the other side of the spectrum, in a microconstruct perspective, framing "describes how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions." (p.12), which means that audience members interpret media coverage based on the way information is framed. For example, if F1 Academy articles highlight coverage that integrates female drivers into standard motorsport narratives (e.g., rivalries, talent development, championship battles) it normalizes their presence in elite racing.

In examining feature articles from the F1 Academy website, this study explores how these media representations are constructed: are the drivers framed as competitive athletes with skill,

determination, and expertise, or are they framed more as exceptions within a male-dominated sport, with their gender highlighted as a central aspect of their identity? This theoretical framework now draws all these theories together in offering an integrated approach to the ways in which gendered narratives are constructed through media coverage of the F1 Academy. Drawing on such theories, the current thesis seeks to understand not only how women are represented but also the way these representations are created and negotiated by the societal norm, power, and general cultural context in motorsport - such questions determine whether the F1 Academy signals a new approach to issues of gender representation or simply further reinforces preexisting stereotypes about women athletes.

3. Methods

3.1. Operationalization

The analysis is guided by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020) and informed by an operationalization of key theoretical concepts to ensure coherence between theory and the coding itself. Rather than applying these concepts separately, they are integrated to provide a multidimensional foundation on how gender representation in the F1 Academy articles is constructed and communicated.

Central to this step is the concept of gender as a social construct, continuously produced through discourse, norms, and practices (in the eyes of Kochanek et al (2021) and Butler (1990). This informs the coding of instances where drivers and team members articulate their identities, whether through language, aesthetic choices, emotional narratives, or professional aspects. Furthermore, framing theory (Entman, 1993; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) helps pinpoint how the data emphasizes particular aspects such as relational/familial support, symbolic victories, or personal struggles while minimizing or omitting others. Postfeminist theories (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009) are another pillar, this time to the tensions between portrayals of empowerment and the reproduction of traditional femininity. For example, in cases in which individual agency is put alongside beauty related topics, or emotionality. Concepts of visibility or inclusivity (Gallagher, 2013; Naess & Tjønndal, 2021) support to identify patterns of inclusion, collective belonging and tokenism, or, on the contrary, genuine presence. Finally, feminist critiques of sports media (Koivula, 1999; Kane, 1996; Cooky et al., 2015) help coding for instances of stereotyping. The integration of these concepts enables themes to be descriptive of patterns in the data and ensures that the theoretical concepts are thought together to provide a dimensional analysis.

3.2. Research design

Thematic analysis is used for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79), providing a versatile method for examining meaning contained within text, making it the best choice for this thesis. This approach makes it possible to examine gendered issues in the media depictions and explore sociocultural issues and the construction of gender, therefore, making it appropriate to study how these themes influence society’s view on women in racing sports. Thematic analysis allows for a systematic identification of key patterns in how female drivers and team members are discussed, the language used, their personality and abilities, and their overall representations in the articles. While constructivist theory is defined as “we interact with data and create theories about it” (Charmaz, 2006, p.129), thematic analysis identifies patterns within qualitative data without necessarily constructing new theory – it can be

applied within various theoretical contexts depending on the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81). Since framing theory examines how media shapes public perception through specific lenses, the use of reflexive thematic analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2020), is particularly fitting, as it gives the researcher the main role to identify themes and significant information within the data (p.343), acknowledging that meaning is co-constructed through the interaction with the data, guaranteeing an in-depth study of gender representation and bias from multiple points of view (p.331.)

3.3. Data collection and sampling

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, articles from various stages of the F1 Academy series are included – from March 20th of 2024 to December 20th of 2024, allowing for an investigation into how these representations of women have evolved in the span of nine months, as the series gained visibility and traction⁴. In detail, the data collection process entails 1) methodically compiling the articles obtained from the “Feature” section/filter on the official F1 Academy website, accessible through www.f1academy.com/Latest?filters=Feature; 2) select only the articles relevant to the research focus (meaning the articles that focus on the drivers and team members and their experiences); and lastly, 3) download the articles for easy access during the coding process and analysis (PDF format).

The sample consists of 38 articles from the F1 Academy official website’s “Feature” section, which contains articles that focus mainly on the drivers, their career progress, how they got where they currently are, personal stories, and racing overall. However, some are also on female team members in positions such as engineering, directing, etc., and one of them focuses a fan’s perspective on the discussed matters – all of these articles are mainly constituted of interview excerpts and serve as a tool for examining how this medium represents these women’s motivations, experiences, challenges, and behind-the-scenes, making it possible to analyze how gender narratives are constructed in motorsport media. The 38 articles provide sufficient richness and diversity to achieve thematic saturation, making sure only the most salient and recurring patterns on gender representation are meaningfully selected and analyzed.

The sample was drawn from a total of 50 articles available in this “Feature” section (ranging between 2023 – launch year – and end of 2024). The selection process was based on relevance to

⁴ F1 Academy races on Grand Prix weekends in front of motorsport fans and the support of the ten F1 teams, who sponsor and support one F1 Academy driver each, was a cause of growth of the series, along with the announcement of series director, Susie Wolff, Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 team ambassador and wife of the executive of the same team.

the research question, as the selection is limited only to the articles that focus specifically on the drivers and team members rather than those that are purely educational or informative (e.g., titles like the following are excluded: “How F1 Academy tires work”). Race reports are also excluded. The latter articles, while relevant to the sport, do not contribute to this particular analysis. This strategy is organized in such a way that the data collection is aligned with the research questions presented at the beginning. After gathering data, the articles will undergo several stages of thematic analysis, as outlined below.

3.4. Data analysis

As part of data preparation for the analysis, each article is assigned a unique code for easier referencing throughout theme development and the thesis. Articles with a focus on individuals (drivers or people that work in the F1 Academy as mechanics, race directors, etc.) are labelled with the prefix “a_” followed by the initials of the person mentioned or in higher focus in the article. For example, the article about Joana Sousa Falcão is coded as “a_jsf”. Another case is when the articles focus on events or other similar circumstances, where no specific person is the attention of the article, such as the one about a sunset pilates event; in this case, this article is coded under “a_spe”. By doing this type of coding of the articles’ titles, it becomes easier to organize the data, easier to mention the articles in the results sections and ensures consistency – see data overview table in the Appendix A.

A) Familiarization with the data

“Repeated reading’ of the data in an active way/ searching for meanings, patterns and so on” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87), as it is a key point to have a preliminary grasp of the content and themes, therefore, being the first step of this analysis. This phase is crucial for getting fully immersed in the material and making sure that there is familiarization with the articles (read integrally multiple times), according to Braun and Clarke, along with finding any clear themes, trends, or possible directions for additional research, noting any recurring terms, adjectives, or concepts that seem to be connected to gendered portrayals (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.77).

B) Initial coding

Next comes the first coding step, which means taking careful notes and generating “an initial list of ideas about what is the data and what is interesting about then” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.88). This section contains excerpts that address the skills, personality traits, prior experiences of the drivers and team members, along with any mentions of their gender. Codes are generated inductively; instead of using preset categories, they are created out of the data. In such a way, identification of themes is open and exploratory.

C) Reviewing themes

The chosen codes are examined to determine whether they are relevant to the broader story of gender representation; if they are not, there needs to be a revision, combination, or reframing of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). This involves reassessing the previously coded data to determine whether the themes are coherent and encompass all of the many facets of gender representation that are present in the articles.

D) Defining/ naming themes

The last step is labelling each theme, providing a clear, succinct description of each subject, connecting it to the initial research question (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.92), and ultimately the following query is addressed and clearly answered: in what ways do these final themes represent larger cultural and societal implications related to gender in sports media; do they conform to gender stereotypes?

E) Report and conclusions

Comparing the final themes with the corpus of literature and research on gender representation in sports media and in general assesses how the F1 Academy first into or differs from current narratives found in sports media. It also examines whether the way women are portrayed in the F1 Academy articles reinforces traditional gender expectations or if it helps bring about a change in gender representation in racing compared to the previous literature. To ensure reliability and credibility of the outcome, a clear, systematic approach to theme development and coding is employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93); the process is iterative to ensure the themes accurately reflect the content.

All coding is conducted manually, initially using a spreadsheet that is afterwards converted into a codebook to allow close interaction with the data. The codebook has four sections: name of the theme, name of the category/subtheme (within each theme), description of each category, and lastly, examples to illustrate each one. While reflexive thematic analysis typically discourages the use of rigid codebooks (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.57-58), this codebook is developed during this study with the intent to support the organization and transparency of the overall coding process (Miles et al., 1994, p.45) and not as a rigid checklist, and each theme evolved through interpretation, not pre-set categories. This decision is made to manage the volume of data and to provide a clear structure for tracking emergent codes and theme development – the codebook was updated iteratively as new meanings and examples emerged during the analysis. This approach keeps the reflexive thematic analysis foundation while allowing for a more consistent, analytical and organized study. The codebook can be found in Appendix B.

3.5. Reliability, validity and ethical considerations

Reliability concerns how consistently findings can be reproduced, whereas validity addresses how well those findings represent what they intend to measure (Silverman, 2011, p. 360; Tracy, 2010, p. 842). During the study, I engage reflexively with the content, acknowledging and being aware of background, personal biases and assumptions when analyzing gender representations in media and that is why reflexive thematic analysis is a good methodological approach, as it emphasizes “an ongoing reflexive dialogue on the part of the researcher [...] throughout the analytic process” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). By documenting the thought process and staying open to all perspectives, the aim is to present findings that preserve analytical rigor while also acknowledging the subjective nature of qualitative research – I aim to concentrate solely on the data and theories presented, keeping as impartial as possible, though reflexive. As a Formula 1 fan with an interest in gender studies, my perspective naturally influences my analysis and so, my knowledge of motorsports cuts both ways: while I am familiar with its culture, I must also remain aware of how my expectations might shape my understanding of the data. The chosen theories aid my study as structured lenses to look through and enable me to critically analyze the prevailing/contradictory points of my data. Given the traditionally gendered nature of the portrayal of women in sports media, I expect that a nuanced and in-depth analysis brings more subtle or even conflicting representations.

4. Results

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the data analysis. The findings are organized into five main themes, which are categorized based on their content during the analysis process. Each main theme includes two or three smaller categories that focus on important to breakdown aspects, necessary for understanding the broader theme. The found and developed themes are: 1) Evolving pathways of women's participation in motorsport, 2) Family and male mentorship in motorsport, 3) Identity, aesthetic & expression as a driver, 4) Strategy to change & collective belonging, and 5) Optimism, progress & future. Below is the full breakdown and analysis of each theme and respective categories.

4.1. Evolving pathways of women's participation in motorsports

This theme brings together perspectives and reflections of the visibility of women, or the lack of it, within motorsport ecosystems, whether as drivers, mechanics, fans, or in other roles.

This section's exploration directly addresses the research question regarding how women's role in the sport have evolved over time and what factors have influenced their increased participation in F1 Academy. Specifically, it examines the mechanisms through which women have moved from being marginal figures in motorsport to a more visible and integral part of the industry, shedding light on both the cultural and institutional shifts that have facilitated this change.

4.1.1. Expanding women's visibility in motorsport vs. Low representation of women in motorsport

This category looks at the facets of visibility and representation of women in the field, the highs and the lows. The first one is shown through the publication of content in major magazines and other media platforms, the increasing presence of women in the paddock during competitions (working in more diverse areas or simply just attending), or as drivers competing on track. At its core, this category captures a broader process of inclusion and the evolving visibility of women as active and necessary participants in motorsport, there is both a substantive and somewhat symbolic representation here, as a critical tone emerges in several excerpts of the articles, pointing to how women's presence seems to have shifted from being seen as a token to becoming genuinely necessary within the sport. This shift underscores how women are beginning to shape their own paths and careers by merit in the motorsport industry.

Quotes such as "I think you are really starting to see how many different roles exist. To be involved in F1 Academy, it's mega" (a_sh), by Red Bull's Academy Program Manager, Sarah Harrington, and "This year alone has seen the series new heights [...] with coverage in the likes of

Vogue, the Financial Times, The Athletic, and Forbes" (a_kg), on the article about F1 Academy's communications manager, Katie McGuinness, show how women are being talked about and becoming more visible to meaningful exposure in mass media, escaping the sole tokenism. These women are no longer presented merely for diversity optics; they are now characterized for their expertise, leadership, and personalities, as their media presence is no longer tokenistic but reflects contributions to the sport. As Kochanek et al. (2021) point out, many female drivers reject being treated as symbolic representatives of their gender and instead want recognition for their expertise, stating that failures should be seen as personal – not gendered (p.6). In some of the articles, some women of the F1 Academy have said that they are happy to have the visibility in the hopes that their representation as women inspired other women to follow their path. This could be seen as a contradiction, as despite their abilities in the field, they really take the fact that they are women into consideration quite a lot.

Traditionally, women's representation in motorsports was limited often overshadowed by the overwhelming dominance of male figures. However, the rise of F1 Academy and growing presence of female professionals in all aspects of the sport, on and off the track, seems to have started to challenge these old cycles. As highlighted in the literature, media framing has historically reinforced gender stereotypes, with women often portraying more passive or lesser able roles than men, having ornamental parts as 'grid girls' (Smith et al., 2024, p.1110), or framed as exceptions within the male-dominated sports such as motorsports (Koivula, 1999; Pflugfelder, 2009). However, and as Gallagher (2013) explains, even when women are made "visible" in the media, their representation often reflects the assumptions and biases of those setting the media agenda, which may emphasize femininity or aesthetics over skill and expertise (p.23). Media framing, once reinforcing traditional stereotypes, now increasingly includes portrayals of women as legitimate, skilled contributors to motorsport. However, from the data gathered, this higher representation of women seems to be sort of a win against men's such high representation in media. A phrase that illustrates this is "I can promise you, it's not a man's world anymore" (a_dydm), stated by Susie Wolff during an F1 Academy DICOVER YOUR DRIVE event for young women in Miami.

After analyzing the articles, it seems that women need to outnumber men in order to be counted in as good, or better than them, as expressed by a competition manager, Delphine Biscaye, addressing how she plans on building the talent pool in F1 Academy: "When I was with Venturi and already (working) with Susie (Wolff), we tried to increase the diversity and the women in our team. We managed to reach a third of the team being female, so going from fighting to get one-third to actually doing it on a global scale — trying to attract more female drivers but also, more women in

all kinds of jobs and roles really had a meaning" (a_db). This spoken increased visibility or participation spans across multiple types of roles, for instance, women in technical, managerial, and strategic positions are becoming more common, contributing to the apparent change in structure in the field. "Working alongside Joana Sousa Falcão, RGMMC's Head of Race Control, the two women are setting an example to the ever-growing number of young, female karters" (a_pm), which is a quote from the article on Patricia Montesinos, RGMMC's Chief Technical Control Delegate, aligning with what Kochanek et al. (2021) describe as essential systemic changes where structural visibility leads to cultural transformations and the redefinition of norms in male-dominated environments (p.5). In Delphine Biscaye's article, she mentioned that she has noticed an "evolution in motorsport and in the paddock with more and more women being present" (a_db), signaling the normalization of female participation and presence in these spaces. Plugfelder (2009) warns that framing women as anomalies reinforces a "common sense ideology" that limits how they are perceived (p.412), but increased mainstream visibility, especially when framed without reference to gender difference, potentially marks real progress. In this F1 Academy case, there is no clear distinction between gender, although women are more often than not extolled and praised for having higher positions than before seen in the sport. There is potentially real progress, but there are still some stereotypical notions of what women are able to reach, maybe even coming from a subconscious position.

On another note, it is clear in the articles that skepticism or ambivalence about this evolving visibility is present in the minds of a significant number of the women in the articles, more specifically eight women. Fourteen excerpts in total were retrieved from the articles that revealed exactly this reality. A fan states that she thinks "it's still a very male dominated sport" (a_fans), and Susie Wolff mentioned that from her perspective as "a racing driver for many years, then ran a team and there's this perception that it's a man's world" (a_dydm) when being asked about the current paradigm. Throughout motorsport history, male dominance has been deeply rooted, often making it difficult for women to gain a foothold in the industry. This category addresses both past and ongoing challenges around underrepresentation, as well as doubts whether the sport's culture is truly evolving in a positive way for women.

In regard to the lack of representation years ago, Patricia Montesinos shares that "you'd go to the different tracks and you'd see one or two women normally" (a_pm), illustrating just how scarce female participation once was, especially at the grassroots and professional levels, this time in the Spanish karting championships events she used to take part in. As Matthews and Pike (2016) noted, women have been absent not only from driving roles but also from leadership and

operational positions due to a combination of gender norms and institutional exclusion. Several articles expressed that people still see motorsport as a “male-dominated environment”, indicating that while some progress has been made, full integration is far from realized: when one intervener, Delphine Biscaye, was asked whether having more female role models would have made her journey easier, she responded, “the fact that there were so few women in motorsport in the paddock when I started also helped me in some ways” (a_db). This perspective complicates the narrative, showing how scarcity could paradoxically offer visibility or distinction to women, even within a limiting environment. Gallagher (2013) argues that representation alone is not enough; how women are framed and if they are shown as competent professionals matters just as much, if not more (p.27).

Another issue highlighted was the lack of women in leadership roles or lack of availability of those to women – “there are lots of different jobs in motorsport as well. That’s sometimes difficult, they don’t really know where they could fit. They see only the mechanics, engineers and on TV, we’re not very represented” (a_db) – aligning with Koivula’s (1999) observation that media often reinforces narrow stereotypes, portraying men as competent professionals while women are largely sidelined or shown in limited roles (p.591). Along the same lines, the lack of representation in those roles affects not only the current professionals, but also the young girls who don’t see visible pathways into the sport. As, once more, Delphine Biscaye puts it, “one of the most difficult things when you’re a young girl is to know what you can do in motorsports” (a_db), demonstrating the existent lesser coverage of female participation in motorsports compared to male coverage.

The desire to see a more integrated motorsport culture was expressed through statements such as “to see a mixed paddock, which is still not the case” (a_db), reaffirming that structural change is still needed. Kochanek et al. (2021) emphasize that visibility without structural support can leave women vulnerable to tokenism or heightened scrutiny, reinforcing their role as “representatives of their gender” rather than as individual professionals (p.6). Hence, this lack of role models in the past compounded the isolation that many women experienced in motorsport. As Silvia Bellot explained, she felt a lot of responsibility on her shoulders for the next generation to see, as no other women has had the job she has, F1 Academy’s Race Director. The feeling of being an exception, like an anomaly, just as Plugfelder (2009) described is exacerbated by the absence of mentors that could offer guidance or a clear path. The recognition of this gap has driven female professionals to become advocates for greater representation (of their gender), striving to ensure future generations don’t face the same hurdle.

4.1.2. Female role models and peer inspiration

As said previously, female role models are central in shaping the aspirations of young girls entering the sport. Some women in particular have become sources of inspiration for many, demonstrating that success in motorsport can take many forms, not just in terms of driving ability, but also leadership, strategy, and technical expertise, even though there were very few examples of this. As one fan that took part in an event created by the F1 Academy noted in an article, “Susie Wolff is definitely one of them [an inspiring figure], but also Bernie Collins and Ruth Buscombe. They are just huge people who have created such a name for themselves within the sport” (a_spe). This sentiment of admiration is shared across multiple articles and reflects how much of a contribution these women have made for the sport.

Moreover, they play a significant role in inspiring other women in pursuing their ambitions, as it is noted by Charlotte Phelps, a Race Engineer at MP Motorsport, “weirdly, I look up to all women in motorsport. I think everyone has had their own battles to get where they are” (a_cp). This highlights the shared experiences that each woman lives, serving as roadmaps for others, illustrating that success is not confined to a single narrative; notably, female role models like Jamie Chadwick are helping to shift perceptions by proving that women can compete on equal terms with their male counterparts: She is “another racing idol. I think she’s really good and she’s made a big step for women in motorsport” (a_je). Alongside Jamie Chadwick, Susie Wolff is also mentioned by two other interveners as being an inspiration and figure they look up to, “but also Bernie Collins and Ruth Buscombe. They’re just huge people who have created such a name for themselves within the sport” (a_spe), which is a quote that demonstrates that even though there are not many female names in the industry, the women that managed to succeed made a mark on these people. As such, they are not only trailblazers but become symbols of hope and transformation (Sturm, 2021, p.115)

4.1.3. Breaking through the “only woman” barrier

Several articles recall the challenges women faced as pioneers in their field. The feeling of being the “only woman” in the paddock is a common theme here, with Silvia Bellot, F1 Academy’s Race Director, noting that “being a woman 20 years ago, there was no clear path” (a_sb). Historically, women have been isolated and seen as outliers or exceptions in the paddock, which was compounded by the need to represent all women, evidently placing a heavy symbolic burden on any woman who made it to the top.

As Puwar (2008) notes, women in traditionally male-dominated spaces disrupt the norm as “space invaders”, even though their mere presence does not mean inherent inclusion (p.8). Katie McGuinness, F1 Academy’s Communications Manager talks about the nuances of her work and

hopes that “that in five years’ time when you turn on a TV, a little girl will look and see an engineer who’s a woman and see a mechanic who’s a woman. The strategies [they’re] putting in place, the initiatives and programmes [they’re] introducing will all help with that swell of change that’s coming” (a_kg). This vision speaks to the broader shift occurring within motorsport, where female presence in the F1 Academy is becoming the norm, where there are only female drivers, there is a rise in female engineers and other team members, meaning that one woman in racing no longer needs to bear the weight of representing all women in motorsport. “Nothing’s ever been impossible because she’s already done it” (a_cp), said Race Engineer Charlotte Phelps when talking about her mother’s accomplishment of becoming a successful engineer in the field of motorsport, basically implying that if she can do it, every woman can do it as well. This is a statement that highlights how breaking the only woman barrier is not only about individual success, but also about the collective impact, where women are no longer isolated but part of a larger community. From a postfeminist perspective, this foregrounds the valorization of individual agency, empowerment and personal choice as defining features of contemporary gender discourse. McRobbie (2009) contends that postfeminism recasts women’s achievements as personal success rooted in self-determination and individual efforts whilst overlooking the structural and collective dimensions of gender inequality (p.25). The increasing normalization of women occupying roles usually taken by men in motorsport reflects a move away from collective feminist activism toward individual visibility and accomplishment as markers of progress. Consequently, the growing presence of women in racing not only symbolizes empowerment but also acts as a catalyst for redefining societal norms and expectations regarding gender diversity in the sport. One example of this is Biscayes’ insight on when she got the job as a Competition Manager at F1 Academy, she was not sure if her journey “would have been easier at that time. It was hard at times, but the fact that we were so few women [...] helped [her]” (a_db), implying that the fact that there were not a lot of women yet it was a plus.

The experience of the women in the articles who have seen these shifts first hand note that now you notice more women at the tracks, implying the tangible effect that F1 Academy’s initiatives have the power to expand the pipeline for women into other motorsports, with more opportunities for involvement and leadership. Connell (2005) explains how gender roles are not static but actively constructed and negotiated through media, culture and institutional policies (p.71), therefore, the increased media exposure reflects a growing acknowledgment of women’s potential in motorsports. This visibility challenges preconceived notions of gender in sport, dismantling gender barriers.

This theme also relates to how societal norms and expectations shape both opportunities

and experiences in motorsport. The data underlines the importance of visibility and role models as essential tools in shifting personal aspirations and institutional attitudes.

Moreover, there are portions in the articles that recognize an increase in female participation, which is directly linked to theories of representation and visibility, meaning that the media and their created representations are powerful agents in building foundations and notions, individually and as a society. The focus on visibility and the media attention, along with social change, can help frame women's presence in motorsports not as an anomaly, but as a normal piece in the landscape of the field.

4.2. Family and male mentorship in the F1 Academy

The next theme explores how relationships between women in the articles and male family members act as getaways for these women entering the realms of motorsport. Contrary to the common assumption that masculinity in motorsports is inherently exclusionary, as suggested in early studies such as Kane (1996) many of the women describe their fathers, brothers and other male figures as important sources of support, mentorship, and motivation for the career they're building (p.96). This reflects what Kochanek et al. (2021) describe as women operating "within and through relational structures" (p.5) where support and constraint coexist, and also aligns with Shoemaker & Reese's (1996) arguments that family and media together establish what is seen as legitimate or attainable in sport (p.11). In fact, the data set shows that most women in the F1 Academy are not stepping into motorsport from the margins, they are often born into it; across multiple articles, the significance they give to male family members and their influence is seemingly powerful for this analysis, and all of them manifest patterns that show while institutional barriers remain, interpersonal relationships with men frequently serve as good getaways into the sport. This not only reinforces Kochanek et al.'s (2021) view of families as countering exclusionary institutional logics (p.4) but also substantiates Cooky et al.'s (2015) critique of how sports media legitimized woman's participation primarily through association with men (p.277).

4.2.1. Foundational father/male figure mentions

Fathers, grandfathers, uncles and cousins are often mentioned and appear as inspiration and never once in a deprecating way throughout the articles. They are not merely background figures but often facilitators because there have been (or are) mechanics, trainers, emotional anchors, fans of the sport, etc. Echoing Connell's (2005) notion that gender roles are negotiated through culture and practices (p.71, for instance, Leah Block's career began in a rallycross paddock with her dad as she traveled around the world with him during his career in motor racing. Similarly, driver Chloe Chambers noted that her "dad was [her] mechanic all the way through karting" (a_cc),

which reflects what Koivula (1999) identifies as gendered framing of access where opportunity is mediated through male endorsement (p.591).

Some fathers of these women now in the F1 Academy initiated their daughter's career paths. For example, now F1 Academy driver Nerea Martí noted that when she was young there was no possibility for her to compete since it was too expensive, revealing how economic and gender access often intertwined with these sports. Fathers act as material contributions who purchase equipment, build karts, or offer training, but also help in other aspects. Quotes such as: "He gives some good advice [...] it's nice having him to look up to" highlight the intimate transmission of knowledge and emotional support that often precedes formal training. This dynamic reflects Entman's (1993, p.52) framing model, where the media structure these relationships as positive forces downplaying systemic inequalities. Financial constraints initially limited participation until Nerea's father's determination overcame these barriers, connecting to Cooky et al. (2015, p.278), who argue that familial support can mask structural inequalities by affirming success as a matter of individual or family resourcefulness.

Furthermore, it's notable to mention the drivers' independence and the agency, as the influence of male figures, though vital, does not eclipse the drivers owned path to the top or their autonomy. In fact, exactly ten women stated that they became involved in motorsports via their dads (and/or other male family members), but that does not mean that their love or interest for it stayed forever because of them (e.g., Natalie, "I became involved in Motorsport via my dad, and I think that's a way a lot of girls do but I hope not forever" (a_fans)), revealing an underlying desire to eventually untether their identity from these male lineages – a sentiment also reflected in Kochanek et al.'s discussion of agency as a negotiated rather than a given phenomenon, and reinforces McRobbie's (2009) critique of post feminism individualism: female agency is highlighted but still situated within male facilitated pathways (pp.26-27).

4.2.2. Family legacy and childhood roots to motorsport

Motorsport often enters these women's lives as something inherited or woven into their childhood. Jessica Edgar, an F1 Academy driver, is part of the fourth generation of racing in her family, just like several other drivers; some even mentioned taking helmet designs into inspiration from their long-standing family in motorsports, or even their racing numbers. This aligns with Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) perspective, who highlighted how family, culture and media together shape perceived normality (p.12). Moreover, fan Holly mentions that for as long as she can remember, her father "sat down and put the F1 on over the weekend and [they] all had to be quiet" (a_fans), normalizing the presence of motorsports in her life since she was a child, justifying

her appreciation – this constructs the sport as a viable and attainable space for her. References to helmet designs and racing numbers inspired by family tradition throughout many articles reflect Gill's (2007, p. 149) postfeminist reading of agency within constraint; women personalize male coded symbols simultaneously honoring and reshaping legacy. The repeated focus on paternal figures rather than maternal ones underscores Cooky et al.'s (2015, p.277) critique of media centering male legitimacy in women's sports stories.

The notion of being raised in the paddock or racetrack thanks to parental or extended family involvement illustrates just how exposure and informal learning begin early for these women, as most are now able to enter racing (not accidentally): it is embedded. Drivers with family-owned tracks or businesses illustrate what Naess & Tjønndal (2021) call the gendered scaffolding of sport (p.94): the accessing to pathways is shaped not only by gender but by inherited privilege. Several accounts also refer to mothers and grandmothers who raced in other types of racing series in the past, suggesting that while male figures are the focal point, they are not the only piece in generational engagement. Still, the majority of the articles analysed tend to emphasize paternal influence, and this merits attention. Kochanek et al. (2021) argue that legacy and familiarity can indeed serve as informal capital for navigating sport's rigid hierarchies, even as they remain shaped by gendered expectations (pp.4-5). It is worth to mention that there is an interplay between structural limitation and inherited privilege, meaning that some drivers/team members of the F1 Academy had family-owned tracks or businesses, while others watched from the sidelines until financial or gender barriers were overcome.

4.2.3. Male peers and role models

Beyond family, many drivers cite admiration for Formula 1 drivers, such as Charles Leclerc, Carlos Sainz, Fernando Alonso, Lando Norris, Lewis Hamilton, and Max Verstappen. But their reverence goes beyond idolisation, they are described as “inspirations” not for their aggression or dominance, but for work ethic, technique, humility and perseverance, which reflects Entman's (1993) concept of selective emphasis, meaning that media narratives highlight certain traits that align with inclusive ideals (p.53), downplaying attributes that reinforce exclusionary masculinity. Lewis Hamilton “came from not the wealthiest of places [...] I think that's something my dad and I can relate to a lot” (a_cc) – it is possible to see that driver Chloe Chambers refers to her and her father collectively, instead of her alone, which is something worth pointing out, besides mentioning that Lewis Hamilton has a background she can relate to.

Chambers also points out the big impact that joining Fernando Alonso's A14 program had on her, describing it as helpful because everyone in Formula 1, specially a former world champion, is

extremely experienced and knowledgeable, while another driver, Lola Lovinfosse, mentions how she got inspired by Lando Norris' helmet design that was a bit modified to her taste, reflecting that women engage and subtly alter masculine-coded symbols as said above (Gill, 2007, p.149). Therefore, for F1 Academy drivers, these men represent what is possible to achieve, but also they hold an understanding that they must carve a parallel, yet still a gendered one that will be represented differently by the media.

In sum, the theme demonstrates that relational entry point is often what makes a motorsport career possible for women – these relationships, whether familial or aspirational, are not inherently disempowering women but they reveal a bit of a gendered scaffolding that still exists (Kane, 1995, p.96; Koivula, 1999, p.591). Women's presence in motorsports is not a straightforward story of resistance or independence, but of a navigation between legacy and innovation, independence and self-definition (Kochanek et al., 2021, pp.5-6). As Gallagher (2013) warns, visibility alone is insufficient if the media continues to tie women's legitimacy to male lineage (p.27), however, the framing of women and men in these articles highlight something more complex than what meets the eye: women walk along their male support system and are shaped by them but are not to be defined by them. Thus, this is a central theme to understand how gendered access in motorsport is related to not only institutional barriers, but also by interpersonal relationships.

4.3. Identity, aesthetics and expression as a driver

Motorsport is traditionally constructed through a narrow framework that equates legitimacy with physical aggression, technical performance, and stoic emotionality – traits often coded as masculine by society and the media as seen before (Koivula, 1999, p.591; Cooky et al., 2015, p.227). This theme investigates how women in motorsport assert identity, agency and empowerment through aesthetic choices, emotional narratives and forms of self-expression, touching on femininity, vulnerability and hybrid identities into the meaning of being a competitive racer. Rather than being peripheral or decorative, these forms of expression are strategic and layered – reframing what power, strength and professionalism can look like in motorsport. The categories in this theme are 3.1) Personalization as empowerment, 3.2) Hybrid identities: power vs. poise and 3.3) Non-performance based identity questions.

4.3.1. Personalization as empowerment

Personalized gear such as glittered helmets, pink visors, and stylized suits became powerful sites of feminist self expression in the F1 Academy ("I think the glitter is just going to look incredible" (a_ap2)). These aesthetic choices signify aesthetic agency, in a way of reclaiming "girly"

aspects not as oppositional to power but as integral to it as self-assertion. For instance, these quotes declare: “I fell like a helmet signifies who you are and once you have that visor down, it’s like a mask” (a_bb), said by F1 Academy driver Bianca Bustamante, and “Now I’m the one deciding what I want on it... the colours match quite well together”, a quote by Lola Lovinfosse (a_ll) on her Charlotte Tilbury inspired helmet design. These creative decisions reflect an intentional crafting of identity that is both of a performative and a political stance, equating to an act of visual storytelling that operates as both emotional labour and aesthetic agency, which is in alignment with McRobbie’s (2009) concept of “disarticulation”. This is a concept that critiques how neoliberal femininity often masks underlying social inequities through individualized self-expression (p.26). In this context, such choices also reflect what Gill (2007, p.149) describes as postfeminist agency, meaning a negotiation between embracing aesthetic satisfaction and resisting normative expectations. When drivers state that they can now decide what they want designed on their gear, it signals ownership of their own image, creating space for femininity in a masculinized domain.

Helmets, race suits, and even sponsorship collaborations become semiotic canvases on which drivers project personal meaning. In describing their gear, drivers often use language infused with emotion and metaphors (“it’s the first time I’ve had the inside not grey or black – it’s pink and I think it makes it even more girly” (a_ll), “You can be who you want to be, you can be as strong and as fierce” (a_bb)), making it not only about the actual design but also about selfhood. These decisions can be understood as a form of symbolic resistance, in which aesthetic markers challenge the assumed incompatibility of femininity and competition.

4.3.2. Hybrid identities: power vs. poise

A recurring thread in driver interviews in the articles is the drivers’ valorisation of emotional intelligence, calmness, and composure, traits traditionally underrepresented in media portrayals of racers in general. The word “aggressive” is used four times in total to describe driving styles or velocity by four different drivers (a_aaq; a_ll; a_a_je2; a_an). Descriptions mentioning smoothness, calmness, humbleness, and not aggressive enough redefine the archetype of the racer – not through sheer aggression but through poise under pressure, exactly what driver Aurelia Nobels described as being “clean but aggressive” (a_an); she is clean with the tyres and driving but aggressively fast. This phrasing encapsulates how these women redefine the archetype of a racer, blending traditionally masculine qualities (assertiveness, technical mastery) with traits like emotional intelligence and calmness (Koivula, 1999; Cooky et al., 2005). This dynamic reflects what Hochschild (1983) describes as affective labour as an essential form of strength in elite sport, a labour that has historically been feminized and devalued. By framing composure and emotional

regulation as key to elite athlete performance, the drivers disrupt the expectation that competitiveness depends on hypermasculine aggression. Furthermore, Naess and Tjønndal (2021) similarly focus on the fact that genuine inclusivity in sport requires a revaluation of the personal and identity skills that have long been sidelined in favour of more masculine-said traits (p.82).

The presence of beauty brands such as Charlotte Tilbury and Sephora as sponsorship partners touches upon the binary between femininity and competitive legitimacy, normalizing hybrid expressions of identity and counteracting assumptions that power must be stripped of softness. However, this also illustrates McRobbie's (2009) critique of postfeminist culture on empowerment risks being reduced to a consumerist aesthetic, marketable and palatable, but disconnected from deeper structural critique (pp.56-57). The data also matches the media tropes described by Koivula (1999), who found that female athletes are more likely to be represented through stereotypical notions of grace, beauty, or even emotion, often at the expense of athletic credibility (p.591). In the case of F1 Academy articles, such representations seem to be subtly hidden, curated by the women in the interview excerpts - not in all articles, but in some referencing the "pride at racing for the renowned beauty brand" (a_ll), in this case Charlotte Tilbury being the brand, and Lola Lovinfosse the racer. This is where Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity becomes particularly relevant, as it posits that gender is not a fixed trait but rather constructed through repeated acts and behaviours in context (p.11), and in this case, rather than adopting hypermasculine behaviours to fit it the standards of motorsport, the drivers choose to perform an alternative strength, which could be called poise or grace under pressure, simultaneously challenging dominant norms and creating space for new ones.

Ultimately, this interplay of poise and power signals a reimagination of what is means to be a racer in the F1 Academy, not by conforming solely to hyper-masculinized ideals, instead by the creation of new spaces where hybrid identities are visible and valued (Cooky et al., 2014, p.278; Gallagher, 2013, p.27).

4.3.3. Non-performance based identity questions

A portion of media coverage of the F1 Academy includes off-track content, including interviews on favorite foods, cheat meals, TV shows, and personal rituals. One example of this is "What's your favorite cheat meal?" (a_an; a_cc2; a_edh2; a_aaq; a_nm), a question that was asked to five F1 Academy drivers whilst an interview about their racing career, a seemingly light-hearted questions into off-track life, however, it was asked out of the blue in the middle of an interview that up to that point was related to racing only or the driver's career in F1 Academy series. Although questions like "do you have a favorite TV series?" (a_aaq; a_nm) and, above all, "what is your

favorite cheat meal?" (the most frequently asked question to many of the drivers) signals a potential willingness to know more about the drivers' tastes and personhood beyond racing, it can result in objectification of the women involved (Smith et al, 2024, p.5), reducing them to lifestyle figures, shifting attention from their skill and expertise to their personal consumption and preferences. This dynamic reflects Kochanek et al.'s (2021) perspective on gender being continuously constructed and negotiated through media discourses (p.2) and by redirecting attention toward personal habits or preferences, these articles situate drivers in a position that diminishes their professional competence. Though the inclusion of lifestyle-based questions could be an attempt to come across as a more holistic interview, the order of questions they were asked does not seem to correlate with rest of the interview. Entman's (1993) framing theory clarifies how such editorial choices can guide audience's interpretation, making attributes, such as taste, personality, or leisure, more salient than technical skill (p.52).

Moreover, these moments of off-track questions place drivers in the position of performing what Hochschild, in 1983 names emotional labour, meaning the work of managing one's feelings and expressions to meet external expectations (Wharton, 2009, p.149). Although Hochschild's concept emerged in the context of service work in the 1980s, it remains relevant here because it captures how women in public facing roles, including elite athletes, are called upon to display emotional accessibility, likeability, or warmth often as part of doing media work for audience expectations. In this case, drivers are encouraged to present a personable, relatable image, reinforcing traditional notions of femininity that prioritize emotional connection as a means to form a different connection with fans and spark curiosity in the audience reading the articles. The article about Emely de Heus fits in this, as it is a catch "up with the Red Bull Ford driver earlier in the season to find out more about her, including her favourite sweet treats" (a_edh2), feeling like a hangout for the people reading, to build a closer connection to the driver for her personal tastes and choices. Scholars like Gallagher (2013) and Koivula (1999) argue that media representations often reflect and reinforce stable gender hierarchies, so when women appear in media products, it is frequently in ways that prioritize aesthetics or emotion over skill, which is a pattern also described by McRobbie (2009), where consumerism displaces collective empowerment (p.26) by creating stories that are easy to market. Framing is never neutral (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.12) and these editorial decisions are a tool that helps define what traits and identities are made visible to the public; in F1 Academy's case, the focus on off-track identity invites the audience to engage with this aspect of the drivers' lives, completely unrelated to their career in racing. Bruce (2015) notes that such media coverage of sportswomen often emphasizes whether women appear or act in a "feminine" way, instead of focusing on how good they are at their sport (p.368), hence this

type of media coverage reinforces stereotypes about women needing to fit in certain gender expectations to be accepted.

This third theme, *Identity, aesthetics and expression as a driver*, challenges narratives of what constitutes legitimacy in elite sport. It is deeply embedded in feminist theoretical frameworks that prioritize identity construction, emotional labor, and aesthetic agency. It asks: What does it mean to “look like” or “act like” a racer in a sport that has historically excluded femininity from its cultural lexicon? It also addresses how the media either reinforces or resists these emerging identities. Framing theory (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 12) further illuminates how the presentation of female racers in media texts can influence audience perceptions, either reinforcing traditional gender binaries or enabling more expansive and equitable representations. The recurring tension between aesthetic visibility and athletic credibility becomes a central site of gender negotiation. As McRobbie (2009) and Gallagher (2013) remind us, the media are not neutral, they participate in the shaping of gender roles by deciding what is visible, valuable, and valid.

Overall, the incorporation of affect, aesthetics, and multidimensional identity in the public portrayal of these drivers suggests a slow, yet significant, cultural shift, one in which empowerment is not found through assimilation into masculine norms, but through the reclamation and redefinition of what it means to race. Genuine progress requires more visibility alongside transformation in the logics of representation (Cooky et al., 2015, p.278), so for this shift to represent true progress, media representations must focus on keeping neutrality and professional excellence, afar from stereotypes.

4.4. Strategy to change & collective belonging

This theme examines the intentional strategies designed to foster and sustain female participation in the F1 Academy. It captures the layered nature of change: from institutional programs that enable access and progression, to softer interventions that seek to build emotional safety, camaraderie and community among women in the sport. Drawing on feminist praxis and theories of inclusion (Naess & Tjønndal, 2021; Kochanek et al., 2021), this theme explores how top-down mechanisms (such as female-focused developed programs) and bottom-up shifts (like changes in fandom and peer dynamics) intersect. In doing so, it frames inclusion as visibility, participation, and as a collective way of empowerment.

4.4.1. Development programs and inclusive initiatives/ events

Development platforms such as F1 Academy’s DISCOVER OYUR DRIVE program, female trainee schemes, and structured mentorships are foundational to the pursuit of gender equity in

motorsport. These initiatives serve as what Naess & Tjønndal (2021) interpret as corrective infrastructures, which are designed to address historic disparities in access to training, resources, and professional networks (p.94). These programs attempt to redress structural imbalances of female talent in a domain that has long been characterized by exclusion; and the media framing of these programs often emphasizes their transformative intent, as captured in Katie McGuinness's point of view: "The strategies we're putting in place, the initiatives and programs we're introducing will all help with that swell of change that's coming". (a_kg). Such framing aligns with Entman's (1993) view on a strategic selection and amplification of certain messages with the intent to shape the public's understanding, and in this particular case, F1 Academy is portraying these initiatives as harbingers of inevitable and positive change. Similarly, the female trainee program offers early-career operational roles to young women, however, these initiatives must be critically examined in relation to past models. The *W Series* was critiqued for reinforcing gender segregation by establishing a separate circuit for female drivers rather than integrating them into the mainstream (Næss & Tjønndal, 2021, p. 88). In contrast, the F1 Academy attempts to become a steppingstone rather than a mirror of the previous initiatives, a distinction that determines whether it disrupts or inadvertently upholds structural inequality. These programs aim to "change perceptions and inspire the next generations" (a_fans), said Natalie, explicitly going against gender norms and the biased myth that women "drive differently" or lack the technical connection needed to drive the same vehicles (Pflugfelder, 2009, p.423).

Beyond technical development, emotional safety and peer solidarity play important roles in sustaining gender inclusion. Although events like the one mentioned in the article Sunset Pilates are described as fostering a welcome and supportive environment (a_spe), gendered events of this nature raise concerns and highlight a tension. On one hand, they can be seen as practical tools of resistance, functioning as opportunities for women to build mutual support in contexts where they are underrepresented – "there needs to be more female representation" (a_spe). On the other hand, while the Pilates event offers genuine "growing community" (a_spe), it also highlights that inclusion in this context risks being coded as comfort and soft, rather than actual empowerment and risks reinscribing soft, feminine expectations. Empowerment can often be domesticated through acts of self-care and well-being (e.g., skincare, healthy eating, mindfulness, yoga, and in this case, pilates). Although these are seen to be good for people in general, they focus on personal aspects rather than directly addressing the bigger inequality system, thus leading to a potential masking or covering up of serious inequalities (McRobbie, 2009, p.26). Nevertheless, the value of such initiatives should not be totally discarded outright, as Kochanek et al. (2021) note, female athletes bear the symbolic burden to represent all women in their field (p.6), leading to more

pressure and scrutiny. Considering that, having restorative environments such as the Sunset Pilates event may serve as a counterbalance of this symbolic burden, allowing women to connect with each other in the name of motorsport.

4.4.2. Collective visibility and changing fan cultures

Another vital layer is visibility, not only for drivers, but for fans. Female spectatorship is on the rise, with nearly 40% of F1's viewership now made up of women, a significant jump from 20% in 2019 (a_fans). "TikTok and Drive To Survive are often attributed with having contributed to this change" (a_fans) and the rise of female-centered media, alongside with the increased visibility of female racers on social platforms. Media framing does not simply reflect shifts in participation, it also helps produce conditions under which certain groups are recognized as legitimate participants (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p.12) and, in this case, changing fan cultures reshapes who is seen as belonging in motorsport. This shift creates what one might call a reciprocal empowerment loop, where drivers inspire fans, and fans, in turn, create demand for more inclusive representation. As noted, "to compete with F1 on the same weekends, it'll get more people talking about it because they'll be there for F1 and then learn more about F1 Academy" (a_spe), meaning that visibility begets validation. However, as Howe (2022) points out, even as visibility grows, women in motorsport often remain subject to intensified scrutiny, with their performance framed as representative of all women rather than individual. This dynamic reflects pressures that can undercut the positive potential of gender exposure in media (p.460). This is why, as Bruce (2015) argues that F1 Academy is "is giving a lot of visibility around women in the sport" (a_sb) and must be matched by coverage that focused on athletic skill and not only femininity or easily marketable points (p.368), as noticed by Silvia Bellot; similarly, Tippett (2019) presents that debates on Grid Girls reveled the persistence of objectification on motorsport spaces (p.190), reminding that this visibility without representational change can lead to gender hierarchies to remain intact.

Overall, this fourth theme's significance lies in its insistence that structural change and emotional inclusion are co-dependent. Programs that build skill must be matched by environments that create a safe space. As McDonagh and Pappano (2008) argue, meaningful inclusion needs integration into the same competitive structures, not the creation of separate spaces that can widen difference (p.112), and that inclusion requires more than symbolic gestures, it demands systemic realignment and cultural imagination (Naess & Tjønndal, 2021, p.94). Ultimately, the strategies explored here converge to build a web of infrastructures of belonging, where initiatives, media framing and stories, and fan dynamics work together to enable more equitable participation between genders in motorsport. This theme directly addresses the research question, as it

examines how representation of inclusion is not only enabled through formal structures, but also through effective strategies that shape women's sense of belonging across multiple layers of the motorsport industry.

4.5. Optimism, progress & the future

The final theme captures a forward-looking perspective prevalent in the data, encompassing three subthemes that collectively articulate a hopeful vision of transformation in Formula 1 and F1 Academy, albeit marked by ongoing structural tensions.

4.5.1. Young girls watching, believing and becoming

This subtheme highlights the representational impact of women's increasing presence in motorsport and the aspirational aspects that come with it. Across the discourse, a recurring motif is the figure of the young girl positioned as an outside observer and potential future participant in motorsports. Katie McGinnes hopes to one day "turn on a TV, a little girl will look and see an engineer who's a woman" (a_kg) and her point of view on F1 Academy's work is that it "will help encourage a new generation of young girls" (a_kg), just like Sarah Harrington's perspective that it is important for "the young girls and women watching the action unfold on screen, the drivers and those working behind the scenes are helping to inspire the next generation" (a_sh). This represents a construction of a visibility-based empowerment logic, meaning that visibility becomes the catalyst for imagined futures (Cook, 2018, p.153), that is, even when uncertain or fragile, these imagined futures are mobilized to inspire action and belief in change.

The function of this discourse is twofold, as it legitimizes women's presence by grounding it in emotional and generational value, and it positions current women as bridges between a problematic past and a more inclusive future. Yet, this celebratory tone also obscures deeper questions around access, material support, and structural change, which remain largely unaddressed. While the figure of the "young girl watching" is powerful, it can risk reifying visibility as the endpoint rather than a starting point, and similarly, Banet-Weiser (2018) argues that popular feminism in media often celebrates visibility as a branding exercise (p.153), which can obscure the need for deeper structural intervention.

4.5.2. Symbolic wins and the "not yet equal" journey

Beyond representation, another recurring aspect is centered on 'milestones' as indicators of success, for instance, coverage of the F1 Academy in mainstream outlets "in the likes of Vogue, the Financial Times, The Athletic and Forbes" (a_kg) is framed as a marker of cultural legitimacy and mainstream relevance. Therefore, these symbolic wins signify some advancement, for women in

motorsport as a socially evolving place; in Joana Sousa Falcão's article, this reality is confirmed by the statement "from motorsport's very beginning, women have been intrinsic to bringing the high-octane action to life" (a_jsf) in an attempt to rewrite the narrative by positioning women as integral, not marginal. Moreover, the inclusion of affirmations like "anybody can do mechanics – you just have to be willing" (a_lg), as Rodin Motorsport⁵ number two mechanic Lucy Gould expressed in the article on how she kick started her career, introduces a meritocratic framing that resonates with post feminist logics (McRobbie, 2009) where structural inequalities are downplayed. At the same time, others acknowledge the infrastructural backing (e.g., support from Williams F1 team, mentoring programs, etc.) that enable success stories, showing an implicit recognition of the scaffolding required to translate visibility into actual opportunity. This comes to show that tensions that were talked about in previous themes are flagged issues, where the symbolic capital of the first woman to do something can sometimes function more as an exception, not making it a systemic change (Benet-Weiser, 2018, p.153)

While the tone across the theme is mostly optimistic – Natalie, a fan, believes "we've reached a time when people are ready to accept that change is good and that there are no tasks or sports, exclusive to one gender, whether male or female. Although, I am convinced that the involvement of F1 teams in mentoring certain girls has also contributed significantly to building people's confidence in their abilities" (a_fans) –, there is a clear acknowledgment of incomplete success – just like Delphine Biscay words it "Increasing the number of cars on the grid is one step" (a_db), implying that there are more steps to take to reach the goal. Falcão speaks about the beginning stages of a career in motorsport, where "sometimes you can feel more nervous or that [you] need to prove it more" (a_jsf), and continues by adding that "when they [men] see what you actually know, what you're capable of and you're doing your job, they treat you exactly the same". However, she is not the only one with lingering need to prove themselves in the beginning stages of a new job amongst the men in the field or with the sense that job opportunities are not equal; for instance, Lucy Gould touches upon "the opportunity for women wanting to get into the sport, in the mechanics or engineering side of it" (a_lg), emphasizing that women do not often get those opportunities in spite of their potential to be good at the job, indicating that symbolic changes do not always translate into professional equality or equity.

Moreover, some women express the duality of their experience: the pride of achieving milestones for them, just like Chloe Chambers on the completion of the goal of signing "with A14

⁵ Rodin Motorsport is racing team, present in F2, F3, F4, F1 Academy, and GB3 single-seater competitions.

Management, which is Fernando Alonso's management, and he is number 14" (a_cc2) and Hamda Al Qubaisi on winning the "Italian F4 in 2021. [...] was the first female to do it and to this day. [...] it's the biggest achievement for me to date" (a_aaq), versus other women's perspective that coexists with the ongoing effort to be accepted equally, seen and taken seriously compared to their male colleagues, as highlighted by Natalie "motorsport industry is challenging to break into as it is, so it's important that women are inspired by the variety of pathways they could take to embark on their own careers" (a_fans) and Delphine Biscay's article that states that for her to "get to that position, she had to push through and pave her own way" (a_db). These are examples that highlight how, despite increasing visibility and exposure of women in media, the structural foundation of motorsport itself continues to limit women's full participation to some extent, with media representation outpacing true structural change (Sturm, 2021, p.120).

The data shows the difficulty of breaking into motorsport as a woman, stating that opportunities are scarce, the importance of networking, self-promotion, and above all, persistence is key, demonstrating how progress is often framed as a matter of individual hustle. This resonates with Harris's (2013) critique on how gendered sports representations can individualize success and overlook systemic barriers that continue to limit women's participation (p.47-48). Nonetheless, there is acknowledgments that change is necessary and is being driven both by individual action and the institution, suggesting awareness that genuine transformation meets in the middle of personal effort and structural support.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the articles on women in the F1 Academy highlight the tensions between visibility and structural change, between individual empowerment and collective belonging, and between symbolic recognition and enduring gender constraints. Across all themes, a central insight emerges: Woman's inclusion in motorsport is no longer denied, but it is still being negotiated. The answer to the main research question is thus clear: F1 Academy's feature articles portray women in an empowerment light, showing the upsides and downsides of the journey to becoming part of this sport; while women's presence in F1 Academy signals meaningful progress in representation and symbolic visibility, this progress remains incomplete and mediated by broader structural inequalities that are yet to be fully addressed by the industry of motorsports (Howe, 2022, pp.454-469; Matthews & Pike, 2026, pp.1532-1550).

Optimism and the promise of progress function as dominant, effective frameworks. The recurring imagery of young women being inspired by visible women in the sport evokes a future oriented version (the 'imagined futures' that Julia Cook presents (Cook, 2018, p.153)) rooted in these representations. Themes such as *Young girls watching, believing & becoming* highlight the cultural power of role models and the social dynamics that form around them. Yet, while symbolic visibility is celebrated, the structural mechanisms enabling access to resources, opportunities, or networks, are often put aside in discussions of material or systemic change, reflecting a postfeminist sensibility, as theorized by Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2009, pp.1-23), whereby empowerment is individualized and detached from institutional accountability, effectively shifting this burden of change onto women themselves rather than to the big structures of power. This also reflects the concern raised by McRobbie (2009), in that these postfeminist representations can disarticulate collective identities among women and shift focus away from systemic change (pp. 26-27), limiting the potential of visibility. However, the data reveals a contrasting, more pragmatic layer of strategic content; the theme *Strategy to change and collective belonging* frames participation not simply as individual aspiration, but as a shared project. Here, notably, male allies are represented not as women's saviors but as active participants in transforming these historically exclusive places, which resonates with Messner's (2002) argument throughout chapter 6 of his book that sustainable change in sport culture requires men's engagement in questioning masculinity itself and power, reflecting a shift toward a more relational and collective understanding of change.

Another tension, however, emerges in how identity and self-expression are incorporated into a narrative of change. The theme *Identity, aesthetics and expression as a driver* surfaces women's strategic navigation of femininity and self-expression, serving both as a form of agency

and in other cases limiting gender norms. This duality mirrors Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity (p.11) where repeated acts of femininity can support dominant gender perspectives depending on the context in which they are received. On the one hand, women reclaim agency through visual self-representation and storytelling; on the other, the same strategies risk reinforcing gender representations that conflate visibility with aesthetics or emotional accessibility. This illustrates Bennett-Wieser's (2018) perspective in which empowerment is commodified and performed within the confines of market logics (pp.152-156). Even as women assert control over their image, the space in which that image circulates remains shaped by aesthetic norms that are still largely patriarchal.

This dynamic becomes even more complex when considering how early career development and support are portrayed through themes relating to family and male mentorship in motorsport, showing that *Family and male mentorship in the F1 Academy*, often male figures, remain key facilitators of women's entry into the sport (Kochanek et al., 2021, p.6; Pflugfelder, 2009; pp.411-426). This dynamic risks framing women's participation as depending on male endorsement rather than an independent statement of athletic identity (Kochanek et al., 2021, p.6; Matthews & Pike, 2016, p.1). While such support can be affirming and instrumental, it also exposes the fragile infrastructure for women's independent mobility in motorsport, revealing a dynamic of conditional inclusion reliant on established male actors (Howe, 2022, p.460).

Finally, the theme, *Evolving pathways of women's participation in motorsports*, brings all of these tensions into focus, while new opportunities are emerging, particularly via F1 Academy's focus on visibility, sponsorship and media representation, the pathways remain uneven, informal and heavily reliant on personal initiatives. The findings reveal the persistence of exclusionary norms and gatekeeping, women are expected not to only excel but to prove their legitimacy, embody resilience and inspire others, simultaneously supporting the claim that women in sports often bear the additional burden of representing their whole gender (Koivula, 1999, p.591). This triple burden reflects what Puwar (2004) describes as the 'space invader' effect (p.8), that is woman's presence in male dominated institutions often trigger scrutiny, exceptionalism and the pressure to perform beyond the norm (pp.8-9, 59-61) and, as a consequence, women feel the need to overprove themselves in order to become equally accepted, creating a burden of representation in women as they feel like they have to always perform at their best (pp. 8-10, 71).

What emerges is a complex discursive net where progress is simultaneously real and partial, where optimism is necessary but insufficient for systemic change, and where visibility is both a goal and a burden. The F1 Academy sets an example of a sport institution trying to reconfigure its gender politics, not through denial or resistance, but through an embrace of

diversity narratives. Nonetheless, these narratives, while hopeful, remain deeply shaped by the constraints of post feminism and neoliberal media logics, where empowerment is celebrated but systemic inequality remains under-addressed (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).

It is shown that women's increased visibility makes progress, as empowerment, inclusion, and opportunities have gained prominence, and the articles show women as active agents rather than accessories, side figures or outsiders. At the same time, by documenting both gains and limitations of the F1 Academy's feature articles, the study contributes to scholarship on gender, media, and sports representation.

The findings clearly suggest that sustainable and meaningful change requires representation to be accompanied by institutional reform, formalized career pathways, and critical reflection on how gender, race and class intersect in shaping access to the paddocks of motorsports (Messner, 2002; Matthews & Pike, 2016). This directly responds to calls in the literature (Naess & Tjønndal, 2021, pp.82-88; Sturm, 2021, p.120) for motorsport initiatives to move beyond symbolic gestures and address the deep-seeded structural inequalities that frame women's participation as exceptional rather than normalized. Importantly, change cannot be framed solely as the responsibility or burden of individual women to inspire or prove themselves. As the data reveals, the desire for belonging, visibility and fairness is collective and should be met with equally collective institutional responsibility, accountability and change.

5.1. Limitations and future research

While this thesis provides important insights, there are some limitations to the study to be acknowledged. The focus is on articles produced by F1 Academy itself, which may reflect institutional priorities, intent, or bias rather than independent media perspectives that are usually more detached and seek to be objective. In addition, focusing only on one institution does not capture the full picture on the media representations of women in motorsport as a whole.

Additionally, this analysis is conducted by one single person, which can lead to biased interpretations, therefore, incorporating different people in future research would strengthen the study in terms of balance in interpretation, providing diversity. Moreover, although the sample size was a fit amount for this research in particular, expanding it would provide a more full and robust analysis, representativeness and it would become easier to generalize the findings.

Future research should compare media portrayals with coverage by external outlets or even explore audience reception of these representations. Finally, further studies should investigate intersections with other issues, such as race, nationality, and class, to deeper understand how multiple dimensions of identity shape women's experiences in motorsports nowadays.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The following table presents an overview of the data under analysis, containing the code name of the article, the article title, the date of publication and respective link. The source and author of the articles is the same for all the articles (F1 Academy, no mentioned author).

Table 1 – Data overview table.

| Code name | Article title | Date | Link |
|-----------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| a_aaq | Sisterly bonds and modern Formula 1 legends: Amna Al Qubaisi's Racing Idols | July 31 st 2024 | Article link |
| a_an | INTRODUCING AURELIA NOBELS: The PUMA driver on support from Ferrari, her love of Senna and her karting roots | August 5 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_ap | INTRODUCING ABBI PULLING: The Alpine driver on singing, being a chatterbox and when she 'drove with one arm' | March 27 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_ap2 | A celebratory twist on tradition - Abbi Pulling on her special edition fan-designed Singapore helmet | 2024 (month/day not specified) | Article link |
| a_bb | Behind The Visor: 'A helmet signifies who you are' - Bianca Bustamante on her AI-created Miami design and what it means | May 28 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_cc | How Chloe Chambers' 'best start of her life' set her up for Barcelona Race 2 domination | June 27 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_cc2 | INTRODUCING CHLOE CHAMBERS: The Haas driver on breaking world records and why she's sticking with her pre-race superstitions | June 12 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_cc3 | Trailblazing bosses and being stranded with Fernando Alonso: Chloe Chambers' Racing Idols | August 9 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_cj | Career Spotlight: Meet Charlotte Jacobé, Communications Manager and Team Coordinator at ART Grand Prix | October 14 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_cp | Career Spotlight: Meet Charlotte Phelps, Race Engineer at MP Motorsport | August 7 th 2024 | Article link |

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| a_cs | INTRODUCING CARRIE SCHREINER: The Kick Sauber driver on 24-hour races, Gossip Girl and the track she loves and hates | July 1 st 2024 | Article link |
| a_db | 'Never quit before you've been to the limit'- Competition Manager Delphine Biscaye on building F1ACADEMY's talent pool for the future | December 20 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_dydm | How F1 ACADEMY DISCOVER YOUR DRIVE gave young people a chance to explore motorsport opportunities in Miami | May 30 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_dydra | How the F1 ACADEMY DISCOVER YOUR DRIVE Race Academy is helping young female karters progress to the British Indoor Karting Championship | August 2 nd 2024 | Article link |
| a_edh | Emely De Heus seizes maiden single seater victory as Sauber Academy's Léna Bühler bounces back in Barcelona | June 7 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_edh2 | INTRODUCING EMELY DE HEUS: The Red Bull Ford driver on mountain biking, chocolate and her racing heroes | September 6 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_fans | 'Leading the way to change' – How the growth of female fans and F1 ACADEMY are encouraging women to explore opportunities in motorsport | July 26 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_had | 'You can be whatever you want' - Haifa Al Dhukair on how she's helped bring F1 ACADEMY's race weekend to life in Saudi Arabia | April 10 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_haq | INTRODUCING HAMDA AL QUBAISI: The Red Bull Racing driver on karting shootouts, backflip skills and special socks | October 16 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_je | Family ties and homegrown heroes: Jessica Edgar's Racing Idols | June 10 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_je2 | INTRODUCING JESSICA EDGAR: The American Express driver on horse riding, Austin triumphs and why she loves life with Rodin Motorsport | October 3 rd 2024 | Article link |
| a_je3 | Keeping up a family tradition - Jessica Edgar on her American Express-inspired helmet design | October 23 rd 2024 | Article link |

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| a_jsf | Career Spotlight: Meet Joana Sousa Falcão, RGMMC's Head of Race Control | March 20 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_kd | Career Spotlight: Meet Katie Denver, F1 ACADEMY's Driver Development Lead | August 27 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_kg | 'As a fan, I never saw women' – Communications Manager Katie McGuinness on delivering F1ACADEMY's message for change | November 6 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_lb | Born to race: Lia Block's Racing Origins | May 24 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_lb2 | Rallying's 'Queen of Speed' and Academy backing: Lia Block's Racing Idols | September 10 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_lg | Career Spotlight: Meet Lucy Gould, Mechanic at Rodin Motorsport | September 19 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_ll | 'I'm very proud' - Lola Lovinfosse on her Charlotte Tilbury-themed helmet design | August 12 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_mw | Ferrari legends and F1 ACADEMY's first-ever champion: Maya Weug's Racing Idols | April 3 rd 2024 | Article link |
| a_mw2 | INTRODUCING MAYA WEUG: The Ferrari driver on karting glory, Italian food and being a smooth operator | July 18 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_nm | INTRODUCING NEREA MARTÍ: The Tommy Hilfiger driver on being competitive, fashion and Valencia memories | August 16 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_pm | Career Spotlight: Meet Patricia Montesinos, RGMMC's Chief Technical Control Delegate | July 23rh 2024 | Article link |
| a_ppmd | Physical preparation, hydration and vital sim work –how F1 ACADEMY's Miami's debutants prepare to race on the 'challenging' circuit | May 4 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_sb | 'My biggest challenge was being a pioneer' – Silvia Bellot on her journey to becoming F1 ACADEMY's Race Director | July 10 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_sh | 'Always aim high' – Sarah Harrington on how she's helping develop young drivers as the Red Bull Academy Programme Manager | October 22 nd 2024 | Article link |

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| a_spe | Bringing the Miami motorsport community together: Presenting Sunset Pilates by F1 ACADEMY | May 20 th 2024 | Article link |
| a_th | INTRODUCING TINA HAUSMANN: The Aston Martin driver on the adrenaline of racing and how she nearly went down another career path | June 3 rd 2024 | Article link |

Appendix B

The following table (table 2) shows the themes that emerged from the analysis of the articles presented above (table 1, Appendix A), the categories and their descriptions, followed by some representative examples.

Table 2 – Codebook.

| Theme | Category/ Subtheme | Description | Examples |
|--|--|---|--|
| Family and male mentorship in motorsport | Foundational male/ father figures | Male family members supporting careers; male family members as mechanics, trainers, motivations | “I travelled around the world with my dad when he was racing” “in a rallycross paddock with my dad” “It was my dad that chose (the design), my brother had the same as him” “My dad was a racing driver and I grew up on racetracks” “I became involved in Motorsport via my dad” |
| Family legacy and childhood roots to motorsport | Multigenerational passion for motorsport; helmet design tributes, inherited interest | | “I started in karting when I was four years old. [...] My grandma and grandad both did karting and then my dad, my uncle, me, my cousin and now my little brother does as well” “grow up in a motorsport family” “Her family and legendary Formula 1 team backing have supported her in finding her own way to the racetrack.” |
| Male peers and role models | Shows sibling support/ rivalries, peer motivation (higher series or Formula 1 drivers) | | “I grew up watching Formula 1 back when he [Lewis Hamilton] was with McLaren and immediately I picked him as my favourite driver”. “Charles and Carlos, I will take both in one because I see them quite often at Maranello.” |

“It was Fernando Alonso at that time.”
 “Both George and Lando”.
 “her helmet has evolved from its Lando Norris-inspired origins.”
 “same design as Lando Norris’ but in pink.”

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| Evolving pathways of women's participation in motorsport | Expanding women's representation vs. Low representation of women in motorsport | Increasing public and media presence of women in various roles in motorsport, such as drivers, engineers, and team members, leading to greater awareness and normalization of female participation. Also highlights the persistent underrepresentation of women in the field historically and in the present day. | “This year alone has seen the series reach new heights [...] with coverage in the likes of Vogue, the Financial Times, The Athletic and Forbes.” “The two women are setting an example to the ever-growing number of young, female karters.” “The visibility of female role models has become more prevalent in recent years.” “We tried to increase the diversity and the women in our team. We managed to reach a third of the team being female, so going from fighting to get one-third to actually doing it on a global scale — trying to attract more female drivers but also, more women in all kinds of jobs and roles really had a meaning.” “F1 ACADEMY races on Grand Prix weekends in front of fans as an F1 support series, alongside securing the support of all 10 Formula 1 teams — who each sponsor and support an F1 ACADEMY driver.” “I can promise you, it's not a man's world anymore.” “As a fan, I never saw women. You didn't see them represented.” “To see a mixed paddock, which is still not |
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the case”.

“I think it’s still a very male dominant sport”

“I’m not sure my journey would have been easier at that time. It was hard at times, but the fact that we were so few women in motorsport in the paddock when I started also helped me in some ways.”

“Being a woman 20 years ago, there was no clear path [...] no role models at that stage that I could look at.”

“When I started years ago in the Spanish Championships, you’d go to the different tracks and you’d see one or two women”.

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| Female Role Models and Peer Inspiration | Focuses on visible women in motorsport as sources of inspiration and motivation for others, including peers and younger generations considering entering the sport. | “Weirdly, I look up to all women in motorsport. I think everyone has had their own battles to get where they are. [...] But for me, I was fortunate to have my mum, who’s an engineer, who always encouraged me to pursue whatever I wanted to do and has always supported me however she can.” “[she was] my idol and who I looked up to when I was younger because she was the only other girl that I had in my vision.” “I took the course to be a track marshal and I passed my exam, but I never thought that actually it could be my all-year-round job and what I will be living from.” “It was my first time in that paddock. I didn’t have a big network in motorsport and no one knew me from somewhere else because before that, I was in the design office, I was |
|---|---|--|

not on-track. It was definitely hard to be the only women there."

"I admire her [Hamda Al Qubaisi] racing style".

"Susie Wolff is definitely one of them (an inspiring figure they look up to), but also Bernie Collins and Ruth Buscombe. They're just huge people who have created such a name for themselves within the sport, and I hope to one day be like one of them."

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| Breaking Through the "Only Woman" Barrier | Describes the experiences of women who are/were the sole female presence in their teams or categories, and how they navigated that. | "I was only the second female in the world to win in Formula Regional." "Wolff explained how her experiences shaped her, not only as a competitor, but also as a leader." "Nothing's ever been impossible because she'd already done it." "I really hope that in five years' time when you turn on a TV, a little girl will look and see an engineer who's a woman and see a mechanic who's a woman." |
| Identity, aesthetics & expression as a driver | Personalization as Empowerment How female drivers use aesthetic personalization and self-assertion to assert empowerment, blending style with skill to challenge traditional racer stereotypes and | "I feel like a helmet signifies who you are and once you have that visor down, it's like a mask." "Now I'm the one deciding what I want on it, so I think it's pretty cool and the colours match quite well together." "her pride at racing for the renowned beauty brand" "I think the red glitter is just going to look incredible." "I'm clean but aggressive. Clean with the tyres so not to damage them and clean driving, but still aggressive to be fast." |

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| | expand what power and professionalism look like in motorsport. | "I'm quite smooth, calm and not aggressive enough at times. I think it's still the same, in karting I was I always very smooth [...] I definitely need to be a bit more aggressive." "how calm she is and how humble she is on and off-track. So, I would try to push her to be more aggressive, strong and confident, but I love how she is on the inside and on the outside." |
| | | "But I would like to [...] keep an aggressive design because this is still racing. I want something that when people see me with my helmet and I take it off, they're like 'oh I was imagining this type of person'". |
| Hybrid Identities: | Addresses the intersection of personal identity with commercial demands, how they balance authenticity and marketability through visual branding and sponsor partnerships. | "I think it looks really mean, you can see the dragons and the glitter." |
| Power vs. Poise | | "Normally for our racing helmets you want a fierce look with lots of harsh lines, racing stripes and all those things." |
| | | "You can be who you want to be, you can be as strong and as fierce" |
| | | "the pink fluro that I really like, I've always had my helmet with it. It's the first time that I've had the inside not grey or black, it's pink and I think it makes it even more girly and looks like Charlotte Tilbury (colours), I really like it the big mouth with a lipstick and the same on the front." |
| | | "collaborations between a makeup brand and motorsport, so it makes it even more special." |
| Non-performance | Scrutiny and expectations | "What's your favorite cheat meal?" "including her favorite sweet treat" |

based identity female drivers face “Do you have a favorite movie or TV questions that are unrelated series?” to driving skill. “How would you describe your fashion style?” “Do you have a favorite movie or TV series? I like Drive To Survive and next year, I will like the F1 ACADEMY docuseries.” “If you could have only one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?”

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| Strategy to change & collective belonging | Development programs and female centered initiatives/ events | Focuses on formal efforts (scholarships, training programs, and organizational partnerships) aimed at increasing access, representation, and support for women. Creation of dedicated spaces/ events where women can connect, compete, and grow without the pressures of male-dominated environments. | “[...] and hopes that the series’ efforts will change the perception and shine a light on the presence of women in the sport” “F1 ACADEMY’s mission is clear: to change perceptions and inspire the next generation of girls whilst expanding access across the industry.” “Connecting with local motorsport fans, and support for women. the event enabled fellow female racing enthusiasts and members of the Formula 1 community to engage and connect.” “F1 ACADEMY launch a female trainee scheme — the only series in the single-seater ladder to pioneer such a project.” “One favourite part stood out to all the girls we spoke to – the chance to make friends with and bond with other young girls in a supportive environment, alongside pushing each other to be the best they can be.” |
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| Collective visibility and changing fan cultures | How fans are becoming more inclusive and supportive of women in motorsport. | <p>"You've got crowds coming into the paddock and meeting all the drivers, I think it's a real platform to progress females in motorsport."</p> <p>"[M]any have discovered motorsport by themselves, and there are many varied and significant reasons behind the recent increase in the female fanbase. TikTok and Drive To Survive are often attributed with having contributed to this change, with 43% of UK viewers tuning into Drive To Survive being women."</p> <p>"As the number of female fans of F1 has risen to 40%, this is reflected in the faces of those watching trackside. In 2019, women made up 20% of Grand Prix attendees and in the space of four years, that has grown to almost a third."</p> <p>"to compete with F1 on the same weekends, it'll get more people talking about it because they'll be there for F1 and then learn more about F1 ACADEMY"</p> |
| Optimism, progress & future | Young girls watching, believing, and becoming | <p>The impact of visible female role models on young girls, encouraging them to envision themselves participating in motorsport and fostering generational</p> <p>"For the young girls and women watching the action unfold on screen, the drivers and those working behind the scenes are helping to inspire the next generation."</p> <p>"[...] you turn on a TV, a little girl will look and see an engineer who's a woman and see a mechanic who's a woman."</p> <p>"I hope to one day be an engineer or strategist in Formula 1 or any sort of</p> |

interest. motorsport."

"We'll shine a light on some of the women who are making strides in the world of racing and encourage the next generation of young girls to follow in their footsteps."

"Standing out as a beacon of inspiration for the next generation, Bellot hopes that her example and those of others in the industry can provide a source of encouragement to young women to pursue their own paths to the paddock."

"Once you see a little girl [...] inspired by those females driving"

"What F1 ACADEMY is doing to champion women in the industry will help encourage a new generation of young girls to pursue their dream careers"

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| Symbolic wins | Shows key achievements that signify advancement in the sport, emphasizing success based on merit. | "From motorsport's very beginning, women have been intrinsic to bringing the high-octane action to life." |
| | The persistent challenges and inequalities that remain, while recognizing steady improvements and | "Anybody can do mechanics. You just have to be willing to put a lot of time and effort in and pick up the skills." |

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| | | "Overcoming barriers and creative problem solving, alongside identifying and developing their leadership skills that they can continue to progress with going forward." |
| | | "So much growth has occurred in the last year or so" |

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| | | "I believe we've reached a time when |
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the growing momentum toward equity.

people are ready to accept that change is good and that there are no tasks or sports, exclusive to one gender, whether male or female."

"He [Lewis Hamilton] 's a big advocate, especially [for] female drivers. He's always given the female drivers and female initiatives a lot of support."

"Here in Saudi Arabia, we have reached the point where we don't see gender equality as a problem anymore. We are so empowered. We are having leading positions and roles in companies, in private companies and in government roles."

"You can be a driver, you can be an engineer, you can be whatever you want"

"There are a lot of men that are obviously role models because they are the most common people that we have around."

"In the beginning, sometimes you can feel more nervous or that I need to prove it more"

"When they see what you actually know, what you're capable of and you're doing your job, they treat you exactly the same."

"Do not give up and believe until the end, being a woman is never a disadvantage."

"Don't give up, keep doing what you're doing and don't listen to people who say

it's not really achievable because it definitely is."

"Then off-track, to see female representation increasing in the paddock, to see more females having important roles like Team Managers, race engineers, Team Principals And mechanics [...] is really one of the goals and what I'd like to see in the future."

"I was very lucky I think because most of the men I've worked with in motorsport were actually really empowering women and helping, so I try to keep only that side. I try to not remind myself too much of the difficulties."
