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***Still something of a boys' club?  
Representations of Women Motor  
Racing Drivers in British Newspapers  
Between 2010 and 2020.***

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PHD

2023

***Still something of a boys' club?  
Representations of Women Motor  
Racing Drivers in British Newspapers  
Between 2010 and 2020.***

DESIREE JESSIE CAMPBELL

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the requirements of the  
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## Abstract

Since its inception in the 1890s, motorsport has grown into a global multi-billion-dollar industry (Henry *et al.*, 2007). Although it is one of only a few sports where women can compete directly against men, motorsport is often regarded as a boys' club (FIA, 2021c). Despite this and the sport's global appeal, little academic research has focused on women racing drivers within the extensive body of research on the media's representations of sportswomen.

This thesis investigates the coverage and reporting of women racing drivers in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020. In so doing, it *(i)* provides an understanding of how women racing drivers were represented compared to their male peers during that period; *(ii)* explores the rationales for how articles about women racing drivers are written from the perspectives of motorsport journalists, and *(iii)* examines women racing drivers' interactions with the media and their perspectives on the media's representations of women racing drivers. The research employs a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) comprising of a media analysis of six British national newspapers and their Sunday counterparts and semi-structured interviews with journalists and women racing drivers. Theoretically, the research is grounded in feminist thinking and draws upon the work of Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) to interpret the qualitative findings thematically.

A mixed picture of the representations of women racing drivers emerges when taking all the qualitative and quantitative findings together. Women racing drivers were marginalised and *othered* in British newspapers through discursive journalistic practices, themes within the articles and the relative lack of coverage afforded to them. Yet, women racing drivers were also represented as extraordinary and exceptional women. Furthermore, this research suggests that there is modest evidence of emerging trends towards greater equity in how women racing drivers are reported on in terms of article content and volume of coverage. Finally, the findings of the interviews provide useful insights into the themes identified in the articles and rationales for journalistic practices employed in the reporting of women racing drivers. Moreover, the interviews highlight the complexity of the interactions between sport, gender, and the media.

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## Abbreviations

- ACCUS-** Automobile Competition Committee for the United States  
**ACN-** National Automobile Clubs or Associations  
**AUS-** Australia  
**BEL-** Belgium  
**BRA-** Brazil  
**BRDC-** British Racing Drivers Club  
**BUL-** Bulgaria  
**BWRDC-** British Women Racing Drivers Club  
**CAN-** Canada  
**COL-** Colombia  
**D2BD-** Dare to Be Different (Charitable organisation now known as FIA Girls On Track UK)  
**DEN-** Denmark  
**DTM-** Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters  
**ESP-** Spain  
**F1-** FIA Formula One World Championship  
**F2-** FIA Formula Two World Championship  
**F3-** FIA Formula Three World Championship, or if preceded with a country e.g. British F3 Championship, means FIA Formula Three World Championship specification vehicles are sanctioned for use.  
**FE-** FIA Formula E World Championship  
**FEI-** Fédération Equestre Internationale (Governing Body for equestrian sports)  
**FIA-** Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (governing body for world motorsport)  
**FIM-** Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme (governing body for world motorcycling)  
**FIN-** Finland  
**FRA-** France  
**GBR-** Great Britain  
**GER-** Germany  
**HUN-** Hungary  
**IOC-** International Olympic Committee  
**ITA-** Italy  
**JPN-** Japan  
**KSA-** Saudi Arabia  
**LIE-** Liechtenstein  
**MEX-** Mexico  
**NASCAR-** National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing  
**NED-** The Netherlands  
**NZL-** New Zealand  
**POL-** Poland

**PR-** Public Relations Officer  
**ROU-** Romania  
**RWA-** Rwanda  
**SUI-** Switzerland  
**SWE-** Sweden  
**TUR-** Turkey  
**UK-** United Kingdom of Great Britain  
**USA-** United States  
**VEN-** Venezuela  
**WEC-** FIA World Endurance Championship  
**WIM-** Women in Motorsport Commission (established by the FIA)  
**WRC-** FIA World Rally Championships  
**WWI-** World War I, 1914-1918.  
**WWII-** World War II, 1939-1945.

## Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others. I have used parts of my research in abstract submissions for and presentations at academic conferences throughout the course of my PhD. The initial findings of the media analysis and the interviews were presented digitally at the Women in Sport and Exercise Conference 2021 [\*'Redressing the Balance'\*](#) (abstract has been published in Renfree, 2023, pp. 17-18) and the 2021 ECREA TWG Virtual Seminar *'Media, Sport, and Diversity'*. An abstract based on this research has also been accepted for presentation at the 2023 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Sport & Discrimination Conference.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted through Northumbria University's Ethics Online System and was approved by the Northumbria University School of Art and Design Ethics Committee on 22/06/2020, submission Ref 21046. An amendment was approved 13/05/2021 to include interviews with journalists and press officers.

**I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 83,794 words.**

Name: Desiree Campbell

Date: Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2023

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This thesis is dedicated to my goddaughter Sienna who is already passionate about motorsport at just three years old and wants to be a racing driver (and a palaeontologist). I hope you grow up into a world where women racing drivers are the norm in the sport and not the exception.

## Chapter 1. Setting up the vehicle ready for the race: Introduction

By its very nature as a pursuit that in large part sets aside brute physicality in favour of thought and deed, motorsport is something of a great leveller in the world of sport, a discipline that ideally remains ignorant of race, colour, creed or indeed gender. In machinery of equal potency, equality should be a given. The truth, though, is that motorsport has been traditionally seen as something of a “boys’ club”, an arena in which women have often been marginalised and, on occasion actively discouraged from participation.

(FIA, 2021c)

Historically sport in general has been seen as a male preserve and, for the most part, when women have participated, they have been segregated from men (Holt, 1989; Hargreaves, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994; Theberge, 2000). Yet, there are a small number of sports where men and women can and do compete alongside and directly against each other (Channon *et al.*, 2016). Motorsport is one of these. However, as seen in the above quote from the Federation Internationale de Automobile (FIA), motorsport’s international governing body, although women can race against men there is not equality between the genders (FIA, 2021c). Currently, only five per cent of British motorsport racing licences are held by women (Motorsport UK, 2020e).

As with other sports, motorsport has been “to a large extent both dominated and documented by the mass media” (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 1). This relationship is complex, with the commercialisation and globalisation of sport intrinsically linked to the media (European Institute for Gender Equality and Spurek, 2016). Subsequently, it is important to understand how the media represents individuals and groups as it wields significant power in social life through how it shapes and constructs ideals, values and, on occasion, prejudices and stereotypes (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). It has been widely acknowledged in the academic field that sportswomen receive differential treatment in the media that positions them as inferior, less important, and outsiders in sport compared to their male peers (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). However, little academic attention has been given to how the



media represents women<sup>1</sup> racing drivers<sup>2</sup> (Hassan, 2011a; Matthews and Pike, 2016). It is important to note that despite the growth in digital news in the UK, over 10.5m people still read a printed newspaper daily in 2019<sup>3</sup> (PAMCo, 2020), highlighting the importance of evaluating their contents as their reach and influence remains significant.

This thesis aims to explore the recent representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers and gain an understanding of the rationale and implications of such representations. To achieve this goal, the research examines articles from six British national newspapers between 2010 and 2020, and combines that with interviews with journalists and women racing drivers, viewpoints which have often been overlooked in previous academic research (see Sherwood *et al.* (2017) and McClearen (2018) who acknowledge this gap in the research). Therefore, to help make sense of the findings, I have embraced feminist thinking and the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) as a guiding framework.

### **1.1. Why motorsport? Why now?**

Motorsport warrants investigation as it has had significant social, cultural, and global importance throughout its history (Henry *et al.*, 2007; Hassan, 2011b). A recent investigation by EY-Parthenon B.V. (2021) for the FIA into the global economic impact of motorsport found that the sport's total economic contribution was €159.2bn in 2019 (this is a third larger than the world's 25 smallest countries' economic output combined), and the sport supported approximately 1.8m jobs (1.5m paid and 302k unpaid). Forecasts suggest that motorsport could grow annually by between 7.6% and 10.2% in the five years from 2022 (Industry Arc, 2019; Market Data Forecast, 2022). Moreover, the UK has had a long and prosperous relationship with motorsport (Henry *et al.*, 2007). Currently the UK motorsport industry is seen as the global epicentre of motorsport. It has an

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<sup>1</sup> I will describe racing drivers by their gender throughout the thesis i.e. woman or man. However, for ease of reading I may purposefully refer to the drivers as either male or female although I am still referring to their gender rather than sex. The difference between gender and sex is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis the term racing driver is used to encompass drivers of all motorsport disciplines to enable easier reading rather than listing the different variations. When specifically articulated, i.e. in interviews or articles, other variations will be documented, such as rally driver or Go-Karter.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 newspaper readership was not reported for a full year, therefore data for 2019 was used.

estimated annual sales of over £10bn, employs more than 40,000 people and is comprised of approximately 4,300 businesses, with a large number of these concentrated in the Motorsport Valley®<sup>4</sup> (Department of International Trade and Stuart, 2020).

Additionally, motorsport is a popular spectator sport in the UK, it was the fourth most watched sport between 2019 and 2022 behind (1) football, (2) tennis and (3) cricket (Intel Group, 2022). The profile of motorsport has grown in recent years in the UK, particularly the FIA Formula One World Championship (F1). This is partly due to male British racing driver Lewis Hamilton's dominance of F1 in the decade prior to 2020, a year in which he won his seventh World Championship, equalling Germany's Michael Schumacher's record (Gillespie, 2020). Likewise, streaming service Netflix launched *Formula One: Drive to Survive* in 2019, a series widely acclaimed for bringing new fans to the sport (Yeomans, 2021). However, despite this popularity, motorsport has been the focus of little academic research compared to other sports (this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2).

This research is also timely as in recent years there has been a (re)focus on the rights and liberties of women in society (Chamberlain, 2017). Women have challenged societal inequalities across a broad range of fields. Notably, there were global movements which highlighted the prevalence of sexual violence and inequalities that exist towards women, these included viral hashtags #MeToo (me too., 2022) and #TimesUP (Time's Up Now, 2022). Reflecting this renewed focus on women's rights in broader society in recent years, there has been an increasing interest surrounding women in the sporting field (Nielsen Sports, 2018), with a drive for equality in sport as a whole, a reflection of current societal changes. Consequently there have been several online campaigns to encourage women into sport, as spectators (#showup (Cricket, 2018)), participants (#thisgirlcan, #fitgotreal (Sport England, 2020b) and #likeagirl (Procter & Gamble, 2020)) and to challenge media organisations' representation of women athletes (#covertheathlete (McMahon, 2015)).

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<sup>4</sup> The area called Motorsport Valley®, a registered trademark by the Motorsport Industry Association, is based in the Thames Valley in Oxfordshire and the West Midlands and is the centre and greatest concentration of motorsport industry in the UK (MIA, 2020).

Over the past decade (2010-2020) there has been a change in attitudes towards women's sport with "[a] real and growing demand for women's sport in the UK" (WST, 2018). Recent research conducted for the Women's Sport Trust (WST) by Futures Sport and Entertainment found that in 2021 women's domestic sport had 39.2 million television viewers, the highest recorded viewing figures for women's sport in UK history (WST and Futures Sport and Entertainment, 2022). The growing interest in women's sport in the UK has been attributed to the success of women's sports teams, athletes, and events during the 2010s, including, to name just a few: the London 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, England winning the Women's 2014 Rugby World Cup, England finishing third in the FIFA 2015 Women's World Cup, Team GB winning gold in the Women's hockey in the Rio 2016 Summer Olympic Games, Fallon Sherrock's debut in the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) World Championships in 2019 (see Anstiss, 2021). However, there were very few women racing at motorsport's top level (that is world championship level) during this period (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4) and none competing in F1 which remained resolutely a boys' club. However, there were several noteworthy moments during the 2010s when women racing drivers drew national and global attention, including: Susie Wolff driving for the Williams F1 Team during free practice 1 in 2014 and 2015 (Johnston, 2015), the banning of F1 grid girls in 2018 (F1, 2018), Jamie Chadwick winning the inaugural WSeries Championship in 2019 (The Guardian, 2019), the launch of the elite endurance racing teams Iron Dames and Richard Mille which both competed in the 2020 24 Hours of Le Mans (FIA, 2020b).

As with sport as a whole during the late 2000s and 2010s, several initiatives, organisations, and racing series to encourage and support women in the sport have been established. Notably, the FIA launched the FIA Women in Motorsport Commission (WIM) in 2009, intending to create "a sports culture that facilitates and values the participation of women in all aspects of motorsport" (FIA, 2021c). In 2016, Susie Wolff (former Williams F1 test-driver) launched Dare to Be Different (D2BD), a non-profit organisation to inspire, connect and showcase the abilities of girls and women in all aspects of motorsport (Saunders, 2016). In March 2018, the FIA launched its Girls on Track platform with its initial program *Girls on Track – Karting Challenge*, which was a part of the WIM's *The European Young Women Programme* (FIA, 2022). In 2020, D2BD merged into the FIA's Girls on Track platform to create

a global initiative that was fully integrated, with the UK branch being managed by Motorsport UK (the UK's governing body for four-wheeled motorsport) and renamed FIA Girls on Track UK (Motorsport UK, 2020a). Other initiatives include the launch of the WSeries in 2019 (a women-only racing series) (WSeries, 2021b), the relaunch of Formula Woman in 2020 (a women-only competition to win a racing driver seat in a British GT<sup>5</sup> team) (Formula Woman, 2022), the announcement of the new global rallycross series Extreme E (which has a 50:50 gender split for racing drivers in each team) (Extreme E, 2020) and the US-based ShiftUpNow (a movement to increase visibility and funding for women racing drivers) (ShiftUpNow, 2020). It must be noted that this is not an exhaustive list as numerous other initiatives, blogs, websites, and podcasts have been created to advocate and showcase women racing drivers. It is worth noting that the sport was not void of initiatives, clubs, or organisations to support women racing drivers over the years including: the British Women Racing Drivers Club (BWRDC) formed in 1962 (BWRDC, 2022), the Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles<sup>6</sup> which started in 1990 (Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles, 2022), and the Formula Woman<sup>7</sup> competition which was launched in 2004 (Formula Woman, 2022).

However, despite the actions taken to increase female participation in motorsport, there has been limited meaningful change in the top echelons of the sport and there were very few women racing drivers during the 2010s. Thus, it is timely to investigate how women racing drivers have been represented in the media and whether the media has perpetuated these inequalities in motorsport, reinforcing the sport as a boys' club. Moreover, at this crucial time in the sport, understanding women racing drivers' experiences with the media, and the experiences of journalists who write about women racing drivers can allow for recommendations to support the sport's goal of equality.

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<sup>5</sup> GT stands for grand tourer and is a form of motorsport that takes place on a circuit. The cars have two seats and enclosed wheels (i.e. the wheels are covered with body work, like the typical cars driven on the road).

<sup>6</sup> The annual Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles, held in Morocco, is a rally raid race established in 1990 for women (aged 18 to 71) from around the world (Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Formula Women was initially launched in 2004 and ran until 2007 and was relaunched in 2020 (Formula Woman, 2022).

## **1.2. Research questions**

Considering the relative lack of examination into the representations of women racing drivers, the aim of this research is to investigate the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers and provide insights into journalistic practices and women racing drivers' experiences. The research is guided by the central question: *How were women racing drivers represented in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020?* To be able to provide a rounded answer to this central question, several sub-questions were developed. These were:

- i) Did British newspaper coverage of women racing drivers change between 2010 and 2020, and if so, how?
- ii) What themes and discursive journalistic practices exist in British newspapers' reporting of women racing drivers, and have these changed over time?
- iii) Why are articles in British newspapers about women racing drivers written in the way they are?
- iv) How have women racing drivers personally experienced sports media representations throughout their careers, and has this impacted their participation within the sport?

These questions act as the guiding thread of the thesis and shaped the choices of methods and data analysis which will be further discussed in the following chapters.

## **1.3. Thesis overview**

The overall structure of this thesis takes the form of eight chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 is divided into two distinct halves. The first focuses on women and sport and situates the research within the existent literature. It begins by defining key concepts used within this thesis, such as 'gender' and 'sport', explores the history of women in sport and concludes with a critical review of the recent debates surrounding sportswomen and the media. This includes discussions on the patriarchal power in sport and media, marginalisation of sportswomen in the media, gendered discursive journalistic practices in sports reporting, and issues of sex-segregation in sport. The second half of the chapter is concerned with an in-

depth examination of motorsport and women racing drivers. First, motorsport is defined and outlined, with a brief overview of the sport's history and structure. Following this, the literature on women racing drivers is critically analysed and discussed.

Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical framework, methodology and methods used in this research. This chapter discusses the feminist thinking that has underpinned this research, the theoretical concepts of framing and representation, and sets out how I drew upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) to interpret the findings. The chapter goes on to discuss my positionality as a researcher, the rationale for the data collection processes, the choices made during the analysis of the findings, and any difficulties that arose during the research process.

Chapter 4 is the first of four chapters that analyse and discuss the data collected in this research. This chapter draws upon the quantitative data collected and provides an empirical discussion of how British newspapers represented women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020. Further, comparisons are made between the coverage of women and men racing drivers in 2010 and 2020, thereby highlighting the gendered imbalance of motorsport coverage in British newspapers.

Chapter 5 explores and analyses how women racing drivers have been marginalised in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020 through the use of gendered discursive journalistic practices and the narratives they create surround women racing drivers. The chapter goes on to discuss the implications and rationale for such representations of women racing drivers by drawing on the viewpoints of both women racing drivers and journalists.

Chapter 6 continues the discussion of how women racing drivers are represented in British newspapers by focusing on the complexities and nuances of coverage. At the same time as being marginalised in newspaper coverage women racing drivers are also celebrated and heralded as 'extraordinary and exceptional' women. Moreover, this chapter discusses the broader structure of newspaper reporting and how this has influenced the narratives surrounding women racing drivers to 'sell the story'.

Chapter 7 discusses how the coverage of women racing drivers has changed during the sample period and draws on both the qualitative and quantitative data collected. Moreover, changes within motorsport, sport in general and society towards women are discussed concerning this research's findings. Finally, the chapter concludes with participants' hopes and expectations for the future direction of coverage of women racing drivers.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, summarises the arguments made throughout the thesis. The chapter discusses the research's limitations and the implications, providing recommendations for future research, journalist practitioners and motorsport.

## **Chapter 2. Getting the lay of the land with the track walk and shakedown: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

As F1 is a male-dominated environment, you have to prove yourself. And first of all, that means being given the chance to prove yourself.

(Susie Wolff quoted in Bathgate, 2013)

The words of Susie Wolff above raise fundamental questions as to why women in motorsport need to “prove” themselves and be given a “chance” to compete, this chapter seeks to contextualise why this is the case through exploring the position of women in sport and motorsport, and the existent research. This chapter is comprised of four sections: (1) Sport and gender, (2) Sportswomen and the media, (3) Understanding motorsport, and (4) Motorsport and women. The first section examines the impact of gender relations on the historical and current position of women in sport, highlighting the ongoing marginalisation of sportswomen. Furthermore, the effects of sex-segregation and sex-integration in sports on women’s participation are discussed with comparisons made to motorsport. *Sportswomen and the Media* discusses and critiques research on sportswomen and the media from the decade leading up to 2020. Within this section, current themes and trends across the field are discussed, with focus on research examining how sportswomen are represented in newspapers. Further, the research on sports journalism is examined. Additionally, the role of gender and nationality in sports media’s reporting of sportswomen is reviewed. The third section provides a definition of motorsport and an overview of its structure and governance. In the final section, *Motorsport and Women*, the historical basis of women’s participation within the sport and the research that has been conducted on women in motorsport are discussed and critiqued. Concluding this chapter is a summary of the key findings of this literature analysis.

### **2.2. Sport and gender**

Before understanding women within sport, we need to understand what a woman is and what constitutes a sport. Sports and games have been present in society for



several thousand years and have been developed and refined over time to the sports we see today (Holt, 1989). In defining modern sport<sup>8</sup>, Giulianotti (2016, p. xii) states that there are five criteria that must be fulfilled for an activity to be considered a sport; the activity must be, structured, goal-orientated, competitive, ludic, and finally, culturally situated; these allow sport to be a separate entity from leisure activities and pastimes. Importantly, for the case of this thesis, Giulianotti (2016, p. xii) articulates explicitly that, within this definition, motorsport meets all of these requirements; therefore, it is considered a sport.

Consensus exists between sport sociologists that sport is a socially constructed institution (Messner, 1992). Within this thesis, gender is viewed as a social construct and sex as biologically determined (Creedon, 1994; Risman, 2018a). The construction of gender is an ongoing, evolving cultural process that creates differences between men and women (Duncan, 1990; Creedon, 1994; Risman, 2018a). Individuals either accept the binary of gender assigned at birth, rebel against it (non-binary) or travel across the binary (transgender) (Risman, 2018b). Additionally, it is argued that social, historical, and cultural differences between the sexes have created traits that are associated with cultural practices and gendered roles; these associations are labelled as either masculine or feminine (Lenskyj, 1990; Kane and Greendorfer, 1994). Fundamentally, gender differences and ideology have been used and created within society and institutions, such as sport, to maintain patriarchy (Scruton and Flintoff, 2013; Cooky, 2018a).

### ***2.2.1. A brief history of women in sport***

It is widely accepted that the notion of sport as a male preserve in Britain was established in the development of modern sport in the 19th and early 20th centuries when sport was used to socialise and discipline young British men and boys (Holt, 1989; Hargreaves, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994; Theberge, 2000). Furthermore, Hargreaves (1994, p. 43) posited that the masculinities developed within sport during this period were those of “chauvinism, embodying aggressive displays of physical power and competitiveness”; by association, sport became intertwined with masculinity. It is worth noting that motor racing was established in the late 1890s

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<sup>8</sup> Modern sport is generally considered to be sports that have emerged since the British industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Holt, 1989).

when these views were prevalent (Pflugfelder, 2009). Feminist scholars have studied women in sport and the patriarchal ideologies that exist within it since the late 1970s (Boyle and Haynes, 2009), although it has only been since the 1990s that sports sociology has fully recognised this area (Cooky, 2018a).

Historically, women were actively encouraged not to participate in sport due to the 'fragility myth' (Theberge, 2000). The myth was established during the 19th century when women were considered to be emotional, meek, gracious, and fragile, and societal norms dictated that they should focus on domestic matters and reproduction and not participate in physical activity (Holt, 1989; Birley, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994). Combined with medical beliefs on the biological differences between the sexes, this justified the exclusion of women across sport. Furthermore, the myth has had a lasting impact on the position of women within sport, enabling the reinforcement of masculine dominance and the maintenance of power that men hold within sport, limiting the participation of women (Hargreaves, 1994; Theberge, 2000).

Despite the challenges, women's participation in sport has increased dramatically over the past century; however, it is still below levels of male participation (CDC, 2018; IOC, 2020; Sport England, 2020a). The variety of sports which women compete in has also increased. For example, in the 1900 Paris Olympic Games women participated in only five sports (IOC, 2020), whereas in the 2012 London Olympic Games, women participated in every sport for the first time, after the IOC finally allowed women to compete in boxing. Moreover, boxing, which was the last sport in the Olympics that was exclusive to male athletes (European Institute for Gender Equality and Spurek, 2016), is traditionally male-dominated and embraces qualities of masculinity and violence (Finkel, 2014). Women's participation in sport is now encouraged and expected and this is evident from online campaigns such as #thisgirlcan, #fitgotreal (Sport England, 2020b) and #likeagirl (Procter & Gamble, 2020).

### **2.2.2. Sex-segregation in sport**

As a result of the perceived gender differences in athletic performance, the vast majority of sports that women participate in are segregated from men (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008). It is suggested that sex-segregation of sport is institutionalised

and as a result reinforces a gendered hierarchy of sport and perceived gender differences, and by design limits the ability of women to challenge these ideologies as men do not compete against women (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008; Silva, 2018). Moreover, it is argued that sex-segregated sports have compounded and reproduced cultural beliefs of masculine superiority over feminine inferiority (Pieper, 2016; Cooky, 2018a). Regardless of sex-segregation, problematically, sport carries gendered associations which in turn align gendered ideals of participation and stereotypes of each sex, resulting in sports being categorised into gender-appropriateness (Pfister, 2010; Coakley, 2014; Pieper, 2016). For example, research on audience gender typing of winter sports found that figure skating was considered a feminine sport, as the sport was centred on aesthetic qualities (Greer and Jones, 2013). Whereas ice hockey was typed as a masculine sport due to its aggression, violence and show of strength (Greer and Jones, 2013).

Those sports that are not sex-segregated provide an opportunity for men and women to compete against each other and challenge the ideas of physical and athletic ability differences between the sexes (Sailors, 2016). The academic study of gender and sex-integrated sports includes: equestrianism (e.g. Dashper, 2012; Hedenborg and White, 2012; Hedenborg, 2015; Hellborg and Hedenborg, 2015; de Haan, Sotiriadou and Henry, 2016; Munkwitz, 2021), golf (e.g. Bowes and Kitching, 2021b), mixed tennis (e.g. Lake, 2012; 2016), team sports such as mixed basketball and football (e.g. Fink, LaVoi and Newhall, 2016; Themen, 2020), and motorsport (e.g. Matthews and Pike, 2016; Tolvhed, 2017; Howe, 2022). Research has suggested that there are progressive outcomes for women in such sports (Milner and Braddock II, 2016); for example, positive heterosocial relationships (Lake, 2016; Segrave, 2016), an opportunity to challenge hegemonic ideals (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008) and change beliefs of women's physical capability (Fink, LaVoi and Newhall, 2016). However, it is worth noting that researchers have also indicated that sex integration in sport can have regressive outcomes. For example, Lake (2016) highlighted the paternalistic treatment of women by their male peers in mixed-tennis. Likewise, in mixed-golf, women's subordination was repeatedly highlighted through subtle references to biological differences and tee-box position (Bowes and Kitching, 2021b).

A parallel can be drawn between equestrian disciplines and motorsport, as both sports are positioned as gender-neutral (FEI, 2018; Motorsport UK, 2020e). The horse, like the race car, removes physical differences between athletes (Pflugfelder, 2009; Channon *et al.*, 2016). It is also worth noting that, in motorsport, once a driver is sitting within the racing vehicle, with their overalls and helmet on, it is almost impossible to differentiate the gender of the driver (Pflugfelder, 2009). Despite the assertion of equality through the gender-neutral positioning of equestrianism, inequalities exist between genders in riding (Dashper, 2013). Examples of such inequality are that the organisation and hierarchy of the sport is male-dominated, and that significantly more men achieve success in the top levels of competition compared to women competitors (Dashper, 2012; de Haan and Dumbell, 2019), which has been recognised by the sport's governing body and have taken action to redress the imbalance, such as their FEI Solidarity programme (FEI, 2018). Likewise, motorsport is also male-dominated in its organisation and participation, which the FIA has acknowledged and taking steps to redress the balance (FIA, 2020c).

Overall, very few sports, of which motorsport is one, facilitate an opportunity for men and women to compete against each other on a genuinely equal footing (Channon *et al.*, 2016). Thus, motorsport is particularly interesting to investigate as any differences in representation between genders cannot be explained by physical differences. Therefore, it is important to investigate how women experience their representation in the coverage of such sports. This thesis will add a unique contribution to this under-researched area.

### **2.3. *Sportswomen and the media***

To understand how sportswomen are represented in society, an examination of the complex relationship between sport, gender and media is required (Cooky, 2018b; McLachlan, 2019). The symbiotic relationship between sport and the media (Lefever, 2012) has been pivotal in the globalisation and commercialisation of sport (European Institute for Gender Equality and Spurek, 2016). The nexus between the two works with the media promoting and generating revenue and sponsorship for sport, and in return, sport providing content, audiences and income for media

organisations (Lefever, 2012). This relationship is often referred to as the sport-media complex (Jhally, 1984). Motorsport is a highly commercial sport and is reliant on sponsorship and investment (Henry *et al.*, 2007). The value of motorsport is evidenced by the reported £1bn Sky paid for UK broadcast rights for FIA Formula One World Championship (F1) between 2019 to 2024 (Nelson, 2021).

Sports media has been defined as “any sport not experienced in the space where it happens but represented through media” (Bruce, 2013, p. 126). This definition is used within this thesis; therefore, all content about sport regardless of where an article is positioned in a newspaper will be used. Sports media has been identified as a male-dominated industry (Franks and O’Neill, 2016; Laucella *et al.*, 2017; Schmidt, 2018) which has been shown to be paradoxical by both reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and providing an opportunity for the contestation of these views (Cooky, 2018a). Importantly, concerning sportswomen, it is argued that the media is used as a tool to maintain sport as a male preserve and marginalise women (Cooky, 2018b). Since the 1980s, feminist academics have investigated the representation of sportswomen in the media (e.g. Kane, 1988; Duncan and Messner, 1994). This section reviews the past twelve years (2010-2022) of research about sportswomen and the media. Reviewing this timeframe enables the research to be focused on the most recent findings and methods. Moreover, it reflects the period of data collection exploring the representation of women racing drivers within this thesis.

### **2.3.1. Representation(s) of sportswomen in the media**

Numerous studies during the past decade have investigated how sportswomen have been represented across sports media, both textually and visually. A range of sports media sources have been examined including newspapers (e.g. Wanneberg, 2011; Pfister, 2015; Dunne, 2017; Domeneghetti, 2018; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021), TV (e.g. McClearen, 2017; Cooky *et al.*, 2021), magazines (e.g. Weber and Carini, 2013; Nicholson, 2015; Martin *et al.*, 2017) and digital media (e.g. Burch, Eagleman and Pedersen, 2012; Sherwood *et al.*, 2019; Wolter, 2020). Collectively, academics agree that sportswomen have been marginalised and underrepresented across sports media (e.g. Pfister, 2010; Cooky, Messner and Musto, 2015; Fink, 2015; Hedenborg and Pfister, 2015; Bruce, 2016; McClearen, 2018). Sportswomen

receive on average 10% of sports media coverage (Bruce, 2015), which has been found to increase during mega events such as the Olympic Games (Delorme, 2014).

The majority of the academic studies have either investigated representations of sportswomen and women's sport over a short period, such as a single major international competition (e.g. Kian and Clavio, 2011; Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Bowes and Kitching, 2021a; Bell and Coche, 2022), controversial events (e.g. Cooky *et al.*, 2010; Miller, 2015) or focused on specific athletes (e.g. McKay and Roderick, 2010; O'Connor, 2014; Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce, 2017). A significant issue with the existent research is that the vast majority focuses on the Olympic Games (e.g. Godoy-Pressland and Griggs, 2014; Packer *et al.*, 2015; Delorme and Pressland, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2019), which is problematic due to the increase in media coverage which is not reflective of the day-to-day coverage of sportswomen (Delorme, 2014). However, several longitudinal studies have been conducted which have provided valuable insights into how sportswomen have been represented over time (e.g. Billings, Angelini and Duke, 2010; Hardin, 2013; Weber and Carini, 2013; Turner, 2014; Godoy-Pressland, 2016; Kaiser, 2018; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Wolter, 2020; Cooky *et al.*, 2021). It is worth noting that sportswomen's experiences globally are not homogenous, and many academics have failed to acknowledge representations of gender as it intersects with other forms of identity such as race, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality. Indeed, the majority of research focuses on white middle-class sportswomen as the norm (Cooky *et al.*, 2010; Bruce, 2016; Carter-Francique and Richardson, 2016). Furthermore, the limited research on sportswomen from non-Western countries has found they experience more significant discrimination and inequalities compared to Western sportswomen (Hargreaves, 2013; Xue *et al.*, 2019).

Synthesising the past 35 year's representations of sportswomen within sports media coverage, through a third-wave feminist lens, Bruce (2016, pp. 364-370) categorised the methods used to represent sportswomen into 15 rules; five old rules, (1) Lower Broadcast Production Values, (2) Gender-marking, (3) Infantilisation, (4) Non-Sport-Related Aspects and (5) Comparisons; four persistent rules, (6) Sportswomen Don't Matter, (7) Compulsory Heterosexuality and Appropriate Femininity, (8) Sexualisation and (9) Ambivalence; four current rules, (10) Athletes

in Action, (11) Serious Athletes, (12) Model Citizens and (13) Us And Them; and finally, two new rules, (14) Our Voices and (15) Pretty and Powerful.

The first nine rules suggested by Bruce (2016) focus on the practices and techniques used by the media to represent sportswomen as *different* to sportsmen. She suggests that the use of the five older rules is waning, but “echoes of their influence can still be seen” (Bruce, 2016, p. 364). Several studies support Bruce’s (2016) assertion that these older rules have generally decreased in sports media reporting. For example, it is evident that lower production values are no longer generally used in sports media coverage to marginalise sportswomen (Cooky, Messner and Musto, 2015). However, others have found that gender-marking (e.g. Caple, 2013; Biscoomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019), comparisons to men’s sport (Villalon and Weiller-Abels, 2018), non-sporting related aspects (Quayle *et al.*, 2019) and infantilisation (Petty and Pope, 2019) are still commonly used within sports media’s framing of sportswomen.

In addition to the previous ‘older’ techniques associated with sports media’s framing of the difference between sportswomen and sportsmen, the four ‘persistent rules’ continue this distinction (Bruce, 2016). Occurring at the same time as the ‘persistent rules’ there are more positive representations of sportswomen seen in sports media coverage through the ‘current rules’ (Bruce, 2016). As previously mentioned, the enduring marginalisation of sportswomen in sports media coverage suggests to the audience that women’s sport and sportswomen are inferior and not worthy of attention (Gee and Leberman, 2011; Schmidt, 2018). It has been suggested that sports editors believe that audiences have a low interest in women’s sport resulting in less coverage (Laucella *et al.*, 2017). Of greater concern, O’Neill and Mulready (2015) highlight the relative ‘invisibility’ of sportswomen in newspaper reporting, with some newspaper editions having zero coverage of sportswomen. This absence from the news agenda is just as powerful as what is included in reporting and affects perceptions of the value of women’s sport and thus, further marginalises women’s sport (O’Neill and Mulready, 2015).

Sports media has been shown to reinforce heteronormativity, whereby focus is given to sports and sportswomen that conform with the normative ideals of femininity, evident through sports media highlighting sportswomen’s relationships

with men or their domestic lives (Lenskyj, 2013; Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). Additionally, sports which emphasise feminine characteristics, such as gymnastics, beach volleyball and diving, receive more favourable coverage than those that promote masculine traits, like boxing. (Sailors, Teetzel and Weaving, 2012; Eagleman, 2015; Villalon and Weiller-Abels, 2018). Despite the suggestion that the sexualisation of sportswomen is persistent (Bruce, 2016), it is argued that the sexualisation of sportswomen has significantly reduced (Dashper, 2018; Petty and Pope, 2019). Moreover, Cooky, Messner and Musto (2015) warn that the reduced sexualisation of sportswomen in sports media may have further reduced their coverage. It is apparent that ambivalent reporting is widespread in sports media's representations of sportswomen, thus undermining and trivialising their athleticism and authenticity (e.g. Poniatowski and Hardin, 2012; Antunovic and Hardin, 2013; Eagleman, 2015; Dashper, 2018; Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019).

In recent years, academics have found that sports media has started to report sportswomen similarly to sportsmen (Bruce, 2016). Studies have found a shift in how sportswomen are depicted in newspaper photographs, finding that the printed sports media is moving away from passive poses of sportswomen to action and competitive shots, which is reflective of the depictions of sportsmen (Cagle, 2013; Godoy-Pressland and Griggs, 2014; Rightler-Mcdaniels, 2014). Caution should be applied to this apparent progression as a recent study has found that sportswomen are still being sexualised in sport magazine photographs (Sherry, Osborne and Nicholson, 2016). Findings also suggest that there has been an increase in the percentage of photographs of sportswomen in sports sections of newspapers (Godoy-Pressland and Griggs, 2014). The combination of the increase and change in focus of imagery suggests that sportswomen are being seen as legitimate athletes. In the same vein, research suggests that the reporting of sportswomen is becoming reflective of sportsmen. Examples of this include performance descriptions "becoming more brutal and dramatic" (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019, p. 271) and sportswomen being named by surname only instead of title and surname as previously dictated (Cagle, 2013; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). In addition to sportswomen being represented as serious athletes and athletes in action, research suggests that sportswomen are presented as model citizens and through narratives of 'us and them' within international competitions (Bruce, 2016),



these two findings within the literature will be discussed in *National identity and the Representation of Sportswomen*. The media analysis within this thesis will examine to what extent, if any, all themes, as mentioned above, are used to portray current women racing drivers in British printed newspapers.

Finally, there is a suggestion of two emergent trends, 'our voices' and 'pretty and powerful' (Bruce, 2016). The new rule of 'our voices' explores sportswomen's representations being controlled by the athletes and fans aided by online advances in communication, while 'pretty and powerful' enables the notion of empowerment of sportswomen through being portrayed as both feminine and a powerful athlete (Bruce, 2016). However, Toffoletti (2016) challenges these concepts using postfeminist sensibility. She argues that the notion of dualism, being 'pretty and powerful', fails to recognise changes in the culture of the media, turning the ownership of sexualisation to the athlete, thus, suggesting that sports media makes sportswomen complicit in their marginalisation. The dual method approach of this thesis will uniquely enable the examination of whether 'pretty and powerful' is evident in the representations of women racing drivers and, through interviews, analyse the role the drivers have in their representation, and if they feel that they are empowered as Bruce (2016) suggests, or marginalised as Toffoletti (2016) argues.

Bruce's (2016) synthesis is a useful tool to overview the representations of sportswomen in the media. However, the descriptors of the rules are problematic as evidence suggests that the 'old rules' (Bruce, 2016) are still actually occurring and are thus more than an 'echo'. Thus, Bruce's (2016) rules should be used with caution within the examination of representations of sportswomen in sports media and applied as more of a guiding tool than a framework.

One area that has received little academic research in sports media scholarship is the experiences of sportswomen. The existent research has found that sportswomen prefer their representations to focus on their profession rather than on their personal lives or physique (Fink, Kane and LaVoi, 2014; Kovacs and Doczi, 2020). Research has also highlighted that, within the media, women competing in 'male-appropriate' sports contend with stereotypes of femininity and questioning of their sexuality (Hardy, 2015; Bowes and Bairner, 2018; Peeters, Elling and

Sterkenburg, 2019). By interviewing women racing drivers who were competing during the sample period, this thesis adds to this body of literature and understanding of how racing drivers negotiate their relationship with the media and their preferences for their representation.

### **2.3.2. Sports Journalists**

Within sports media research little academic attention has been given to the production of articles about sportswomen from the perspective of the sports journalist. The limited existent research into sports journalism has tended to explore the gender imbalance in sports desks and the decision-making factors relating to the coverage of sportswomen in general (Bien-Aimé, 2016; Franks and O'Neill, 2016; Laucella *et al.*, 2017; Sherwood *et al.*, 2017; Schmidt, 2018). Research has highlighted the power that editors hold in the coverage of sportswomen in their role as gatekeepers (Harcup, 2021) and has found that there is an enduring belief held by sports editors that readers are not interested in sportswomen or women's sport, which limits the coverage given to sportswomen (Laucella *et al.*, 2017; Peeters, Elling and Sterkenburg, 2019; Harcup, 2021). Further, Gee and Leberman (2011) identified that articles about sportswomen tend to be subjected to a harsher editorial selection process, with sports editors requiring articles about sportswomen to be more than just newsworthy (i.e. performance and results—the criteria for men's sport); instead, sportswomen's performance needed to be considered exceptional. Moreover, Sherwood *et al.* (2017) found that even if stories about sportswomen were deemed newsworthy, they were often demoted due the established hierarchy of sports coverage. Research has also identified that the way in which women's sports reporting is allocated to sports journalists<sup>9</sup> affects the amount and the quality of coverage given to sportswomen (Laucella *et al.*, 2017; Sherwood *et al.*, 2017). However, there is suggestion that within newspapers the attitudes of sports editors and journalists are changing in relation to sportswomen and women's sport (Peeters, Elling and Sterkenburg, 2019). This current study adds to this under-researched area by exploring motorsport journalists' perspectives on the production

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 6 for more details on the allocation of reporting beats.

of articles about women racing drivers including the narratives and the volume of coverage.

### **2.3.3. Printed media coverage of sportswomen**

Scholars have investigated textual and photographic representations of sportswomen from newspapers across the globe (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). Research has highlighted that there are similarities in the reporting of sportswomen among Western countries (Bruce, 2016), with research tending to be cross-sectional in design (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). In addition to the examination of newspapers, several studies have examined textual representations of sportswomen in magazines, and the majority of these have explored the historical representation of sportswomen (Tolvhed, 2012; Nicholson, 2015; Lake, 2020). Generally, there is consensus between scholars that sportswomen receive considerably less coverage than sportsmen in newspapers (French, 2013; Green, Holtzapple and McKinley, 2016; Schmidt, 2016; Kaiser, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Frideres and Palao, 2019; Hovden and Von Der Lippe, 2019).

Studies have shown sportswomen receive on average 11% of newspaper sports coverage (Nieland and Horky, 2013). It is important to note that this average includes coverage of major sporting events, in which sportswomen receive increased levels of coverage (Delorme, 2014). Thus, this figure cannot be seen as representative of coverage of sportswomen in general. Studies conducted outside of major sporting events have found newspaper coverage of sportswomen to be as low as 3.0% (Schmidt, 2018) and 3.6% (Godoy-Pressland, 2014b). Notably, several studies have shown that the coverage of sportswomen in newspapers has decreased over time (Fink, 2015; Packer *et al.*, 2015; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Frideres and Palao, 2019). For example, in British newspapers the total coverage of sportswomen as a percentage of overall sports coverage, across all pages, dropped from 13% in 1984 to 6.2% in 2014 (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). In addition to sportswomen receiving less coverage in newspapers, newspaper articles about sportswomen are more likely to have lower word counts compared to those about sportsmen (Whiteside and Rightler-Mcdaniels, 2013; Green, Holtzapple and McKinley, 2016; Schmidt, 2016). This apparent decrease in coverage and the shorter article lengths is at odds with the societal campaigns to increase the

participation of women in sport. However, several recent studies challenge these findings; Peeters and Elling (2015) found an increase in reporting of women's football within Dutch newspapers. Similarly, Martin et al. (2017) suggested that in *Tennis Magazine* the prominence of sportswomen had increased. The disparity between the findings within these studies may be a result of the data collection techniques used. Several studies (Schmidt, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019) have used a constructed week sample (i.e. 7/14 days), which enables the researchers to estimate the themes within newspaper coverage for a larger period (i.e. year) (Luke, Caburnay and Cohen, 2011). The problem with this approach is when the sample coincides with a major sporting event, as is the case with Biscomb and Matheson's (2019) study, the results may be skewed due to the increased coverage of sportswomen during these periods (Delorme, 2014). This thesis will use all relevant articles between 2010 and 2020, thus minimising the effect of major sporting events on the data sample.

Qualitative studies have interrogated the discursive strategies used to (re)present sportswomen in the printed media, rather than the quantity of coverage. Within British research, there is debate as to whether British newspaper representations of sportswomen are becoming more equitable. On the one hand, findings suggest that the British newspapers still underrepresents sportswomen, with the focus of coverage on female 'gender appropriate' sports, and a narrative of normative femininity used to describe sportswomen (Godoy-Pressland, 2014a). Furthermore, Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2019) suggest that the British printed press used patronising discourses to frame sportswomen. They examined articles about women's football and found that there was surprise at the success of the women, male managers and assistants—instead of players—were consulted for the analysis of tactics, and there was evidence of comparing the women's game to the men's reinforcing the male-dominance of the sport (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019). In contrast, several scholars argue that the trend has started to change and the British sports press is becoming more gender equitable, in part due to increased attention to the performance-focused representations of sportswomen (Schmidt, 2018; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Bowes and Kitching, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019).

Even though numerous studies over the past decade have examined the representations of sportswomen in newspapers, sports media scholarship has

favoured a small selection of popular sports, dominated by football or Olympic sports (Hedenborg and Pfister, 2015). Sports media research is reflective of the imbalance in sports sociology as a whole, in which football receives the greatest amount of academic focus (Tian and Wise, 2020). One such sport that has received minimal academic investigation is motorsport, despite its global popularity (Henry *et al.*, 2007) and the prevalence of motorsport coverage in newspapers (Nieland and Horky, 2013). Moreover, in recent years there has been a concerted effort to increase the participation of women in the sport which has received media attention, including the formation of Dare To Be Different, an organisation to inspire, connect and showcase girls and women in all aspects of motorsport (Saunders, 2016), the inaugural season of WSeries (Brown, 2018), and the launch of Extreme E series in 2021 (McElwee, 2020). Additionally, in 2018 Grid Girls were banned in F1. This controversial attempt to de-sexualise the sport resulted in the loss of jobs for women in the industry and consequently, several women racing drivers lost income from being grid girls that they used to fund their racing (Bonesteel, 2018). Despite the recent media focus on women in motorsport, academic scholarship has been slow to reflect this, with only Matthews and Pike (2016) focusing on the representation of women racing drivers in a British newspaper. This thesis will address this gap in the literature.

#### **2.3.4. Sportswomen and gender-appropriate sports coverage**

Scholars have identified differences in how sportswomen are reported in newspapers depending on the sport in which they are participating (Allen and Frisby, 2017). Allen and Frisby (2017) found that sportswomen competing in 'male-appropriate' sports were subjected to more microaggressions (subtle words or phrases that are negative or hostile and used to insult and diminish) in newspaper reporting than women in 'female-appropriate' sports. Research also suggests that sportswomen in 'female-appropriate' sports, such as tennis, tend to receive more coverage than the total average coverage of sportswomen (Kian and Clavio, 2011). Martin *et al.* (2017) suggested that women playing a gender-appropriate sport received favourable coverage; furthermore, women tennis players received prominent coverage within the magazine and articles, and the articles were of a similar length to articles concerning their male peers. Despite the more favourable levels of coverage that sportswomen receive in gender-appropriate sports,

academics have highlighted that representation of these sportswomen tends to focus on their heterosexuality and the non-sporting roles they occupy (McGannon *et al.*, 2017; Domeneghetti, 2018) and emphasise the athlete's femininity (Eagleman, 2015; Domeneghetti, 2018). What is more, Cohen (2013) points out that sportswomen who do not conform to feminised ideals within sport can become invisible in the media.

There are a number of sports media studies that have examined the representations of sportswomen in 'male-appropriate' sports. These studies have focused on sports such as football (e.g. Pfister, 2015; Bell and Coche, 2018; Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019), golf (e.g. Bowes and Kitching, 2019; Bowes and Kitching, 2021a; Bowes and Kitching, 2021b), boxing (e.g. McCree, 2011; Dashper, 2018), ice hockey (e.g. Vincent and Crossman, 2012; Smith, 2016) and cricket (e.g. Biscomb and Griggs, 2013). The findings of the small number of studies focused on sex-integrated sports show that when men and women compete directly against each other, gendered discourses can occur in the reporting of the sportswomen (Channon *et al.*, 2016), creating a discourse of a battle between the two sexes, which *others* the women (Bowes and Kitching, 2019). It is worth noting that in reporting of Olympic equestrianism, instead of positioning the women and men in oppositional conflict, newspapers reconfirmed the gender hierarchy, with women riders presented as inferior, less competent, and less capable of controlling emotions than men (Hellborg and Hedenborg, 2015). Additionally, ambivalent reporting occurred when narratives focused on the sporting performance of the horse or questioned the validity of the sport, thus diminishing the athleticism of the women rider (Dashper, 2018). The reporting of equestrianism in the media is useful in the examination of motorsport, as there are similarities in how sports use physically neutralising equipment (horse and race car).

Research into newspaper coverage of football, positions the men's game as superior and as the dominant form of the sport, thus casting women footballers as 'outsiders' (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019), a narrative which is also seen in ice hockey (Vincent and Crossman, 2012). The use of the men's game for reference in the representation of sportswomen is seen by some researchers as negative, as it highlights a lack of awareness and desire to understand the history of the women's game among journalists (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019). However, Petty and Pope

(2019) consider the comparison to the men's game as positive because it creates references that enable audiences to connect with women footballers. However, Petty and Pope's (2019) recognised that by using men's football to position women's football it can be a way to reinforce the male-domination of the sport to the audience. Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2019) make the subtle observation that positive representations of sportswomen's athletic success in 'male-appropriate' sports can become "markers of appropriate feminine qualities and a standard from which all women are subsequently judged by" (p.289). Thus, those who do not conform to this representation are seen to deviate from socially accepted gender ideals and are subjected to increased criticism (Vincent and Crossman, 2012).

Overall, the body of literature indicates that there are changes in the reporting of sportswomen who compete in 'male-appropriate' sports, with reported reductions in the use of sexualisation, infantilisation, non-task related reporting and assertions of heteronormativity to marginalise sportswomen, however, ambivalence towards these sportswomen remains highly prevalent (Biscomb and Griggs, 2013; Dashper, 2018; Petty and Pope, 2019). Studies regarding motorsport are limited; however, this thesis will provide insights into how women racing drivers are depicted in this 'male-appropriate' sport.

### **2.3.5. National identity and the representation of sportswomen**

Notions of nationalism may impact on the way sportswomen are presented in sports media coverage, evoking a patriotic representation of a heroine rather than an athlete (Bruce, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Sports media has been shown to promote the narrative of 'us and them' in representations of national sportswomen and their competitors from other nations in major international competitions (O'Connor, 2014; Bie and Billings, 2015; Billings *et al.*, 2018). This approach evokes ideas of war, and as a result, the home-nation athletes are heralded as heroines and model citizens, whereas their opponents are portrayed negatively as villains (Bie and Billings, 2015; Bruce, 2016; Vincent *et al.*, 2018).

By describing sportswomen as heroines during international competitions, it is suggested that sportswomen are framed in a manner that was previously associated with only male athletes; nationality is seen as the key identifier of the sportsperson

not their status as an athlete (Quin, Wipf and Ohl, 2010; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Furthermore, notions of nationalism in newspaper reporting can be seen to supersede the normalised reporting of sportswomen, as the standard reporting practices in print media do not allow for the celebration of sportswomen as role models for that nation (Quin, Wipf and Ohl, 2010; Vincent and Crossman, 2012). To achieve the celebration of national sportswomen there is reduced ambivalence towards these sportswomen in sports media coverage, metaphors and descriptors generally used for sportsmen are used to describe sportswomen (Bruce, 2016; Laine, 2016), and there is increased coverage of home-nation sportswomen compared to sportswomen from other nationalities (Vincent and Crossman, 2012). However, several academics argue that gendered reporting of sportswomen remains unchanged and the phenomenon of national identity trumping gendered norms does not exist (Dashper, 2018; Villalon and Weiller-Abels, 2018). Moreover, it is suggested that the change in reporting is dependent on how successful the sportswomen are (Bruce, 2016), with failure resulting in negative representations and potentially the country's media disowning them (McKay and Roderick, 2010; Vincent *et al.*, 2018).

Motorsport is unlike the majority of sports as the sport is comprised of various racing teams from different car manufacturers with drivers moving between manufacturers under contract, rather than competing for a nation (Henry *et al.*, 2007). As a result, motorsport fans tend to align themselves to a particular manufacturer or individual driver, although this tends to be in line with their own nationality (Spann, 2002). For example, 84% of Italian F1 fans support the Ferrari F1 team (these fans are often referred to as the Tifosi) (YouGov Sport, 2022). Alternatively, the F1 male racing driver Ayrton Senna was followed by many Brazilian F1 fans regardless of the team that he raced for, his national importance was evident in the three days of national mourning following his death at Imola in 1994 (Williams, 2010). As such, national identities in motorsport are highly nuanced and complex (Schep, 2023). Research into national identity in motorsport found that in French and British national newspapers during the 1980s home-nation male racing drivers were positively framed and celebrated with non-home nation drivers' achievements downplayed or ignored; this was also true of home-nation racing teams (Schep, 2023). Furthermore, they found that the home-nation was framed in masculine terms



(Schep, 2023). Therefore, British women racing drivers or those who race for a British manufacturer may be reported in the British newspapers more favourably to women racing drivers with a different nationality. Thus, this thesis will add to the knowledge of how women racing drivers of different nationalities are represented in the British newspapers and fill a gap within the research into national identity and sportswomen, as motorsport has not previously been examined from this perspective.

## **2.4. Understanding motorsport**

Having already established that motorsport is indeed classified as a sport (see Giulianotti, 2016), it is important to understand that the term 'motorsport' encompasses a broad range of competitive motor racing. A useful definition of motorsport has been provided by Henry *et al.* (2007, p. 1):

Competitive racing by equivalent machines on a frequent basis, on designated tracks and circuits. Racing is organised around series, championships, events and meetings arranged by promoters, circuits and racing clubs at all levels (professional race and amateur sport).

For the purpose of this thesis *only* reporting on women racing drivers who compete in four-wheeled vehicles will be examined. Thus motorbike racing, motorboat racing and the racing of alternative forms of motor vehicles will be excluded. This choice was made due to the way that motorsport is globally structured, with four-wheeled, motorbike, and motorboat racing governed separately.

### **2.4.1. A brief history of motorsport**

Motorsport developed following the invention of the combustion engine in the late 1880s (Cofaigh, 2011). Initially the sport consisted of point-to-point racing in Europe, i.e., racing from one location to another, for example Paris to Rouen in 1894 (Cofaigh, 2011). Over time, the sport has evolved and facilities such as circuits were built to allow commodification and spectatorship (Henry *et al.*, 2007). Significantly, during the early development of motorsport, a split occurred within the sport with the United States of America (USA) taking a different approach to the rest of the world (predominantly Europe) (O'Kane, 2011). This division in motorsport occurred as American politicians restricted racing to purpose-built circuits in response to a high

number of fatalities among drivers and spectators (O'Kane, 2011). As a result, the sport developed differently in the USA, and there are still significant differences between motorsport in the USA and elsewhere in the world, although these have diminished somewhat.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the UK is considered the “home of motorsport” (Henry *et al.*, 2007). The UK has a long history as the home of many racing teams and as such the sport provides considerable economic benefits for the country (Henry, Angus and Jenkins, 2021). Further, across the racing disciplines, multiple British drivers (all men) have been crowned champion, including Sir Lewis Hamilton, Jackie Stewart, Jim Clark, Graham Hill, Jenson Button, Mike Hawthorn, Damon Hill, James Hunt, Nigel Mansell, Damon Hill, and John Surtees all in Formula 1 (MotorSport, 2022); Colin McRae and Richard Burns in the World Rally Championship (Hope-Frost, 2017); Mike Conway, Allan McNish and Anthony Davidson in the World Endurance Championship (WEC, 2023); and Dario Resta, Dan Wheldon, Dario Franchitti and Nigel Mansell in IndyCar (PitlaneNews, 2021). The dominance of British male racing drivers in F1 is notable as they have won 20 out of the 73 titles since the sport began, significantly more than any other nationality. Unsurprisingly with the considerable success of Britain in the sport, motorsport is the fourth most watched sport in the UK (Intel Group, 2022).

#### **2.4.2. Motorsport governance**

As with the majority of sports, motorsport has a governance structure to ensure that racing is “fair, capably regulated and above all safe” (FIA, 2023). The international governing body for motorsport is the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and was recognised by the IOC in 2012 (FIA, 2012). The FIA consists of members which are Clubs, Associations or Federations, who are the National Automobile Clubs or Associations (ACN) for each country. The FIA has categorised motorsport into nine distinct disciplines: circuit, rallies, cross-country, off-road, hill climb, historic, karting, land speed records and Esports. These categories are reflected within the ACNs. The ACN for the UK is Motorsport UK<sup>10</sup>. Within the UK there are over 750 motor clubs, 4,000 organised events in 22 different disciplines, ranging

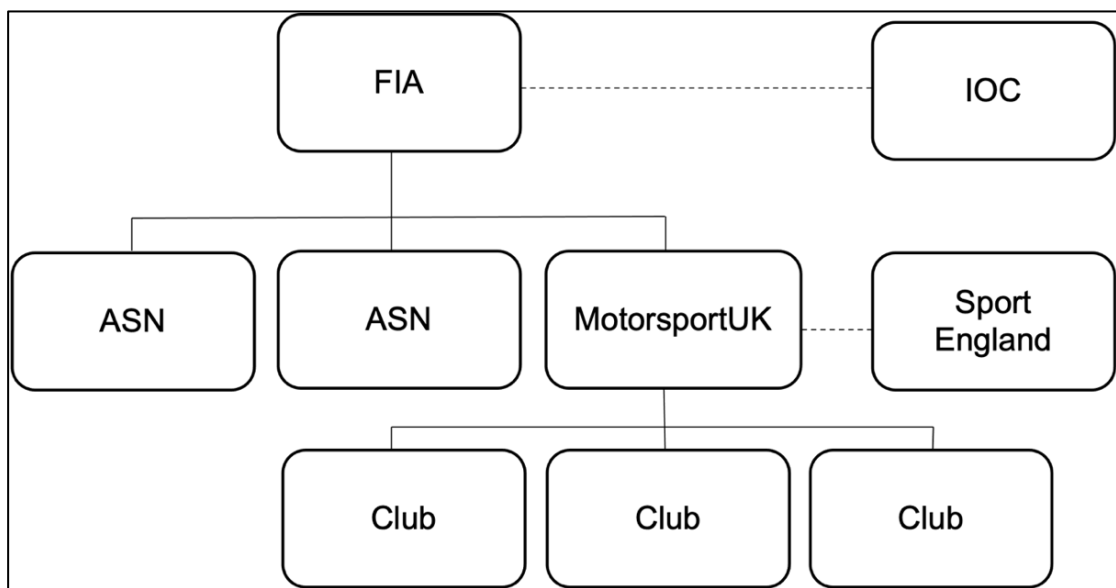
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<sup>10</sup> In 2018 the UK's ACN renamed and rebranded from Motor Sports Association (MSA) to Motorsport UK (Benyon, 2018).

from grassroots to elite level, and 30,000 competition licence holders (Motorsport UK, 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical structure of motorsport in British motorsport, it also highlights how motorsport governance is connected to that of wider sport.

World championship racing series, for example F1 and the WRC, are directly sanctioned by the FIA. Likewise, within the UK, National Championships are sanctioned by Motorsport UK, which also oversees the organisation of various FIA World Championship rounds held in the UK. The majority of racing in the UK is organised and run by clubs in line with the Motorsport UK guidelines (informed by the FIA). This is often referred to as ‘club level racing’.

**Figure 1.** British motorsport governance structure and connection of motorsport to wider sporting governance.



Source: my interpretation of the structure of motorsport.

N.B. FIA has 241 ACNs in 146 countries with Motorsport UK being the sporting ACN for the UK. Motorsport UK comprises of over 700 clubs (Motorsport UK, 2023). The dotted lines highlight the wider sporting governance body that world and UK motorsport are recognised by.

In principle, motorsport is accessible to all due to the use of technology (the vehicle) that, it has been argued, neutralises physical differences (Pflugfelder, 2009). As such, men and women can compete directly against each other. Likewise, disabled drivers can compete against non-disabled drivers, which makes the sport unusual as most sports are not so inclusive by default. However, despite these inclusive credentials, motorsport has tended to be seen as a sport for the wealthy, due to the

high associated costs with competing (e.g. vehicle, personal safety equipment, running costs, transportation, membership, and licence fees). Furthermore, the sport lacks diversity as it is a sport dominated by white men, a point that has recently been acknowledged by the FIA (FIA, 2021c; The Hamilton Commission, Morgan and Scarlet, 2021).

The lack of women competing in the sport has been documented since its inception (Bouzanquet, 2009). There is no reason why women should not be competing alongside men at all levels of the sport, however, participation records show that this is not the case, with only five percent of British motorsport racing licences being held by women (Motorsport UK, 2020e). Indeed, the marginalisation of women competing in motorsport is more acute than the marginalisation of women seen across sport as a whole (CDC, 2018; IOC, 2020; Sport England, 2020a). This discrepancy between motorsport and sport in general warrants investigation. One possible contributing factor to this phenomenon may be the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of the sport.

## **2.5. *Motorsport and women***

Despite the fact that motorsport is a multi-billion-dollar industry (Henry *et al.*, 2007; Mourão, 2017) with global popularity (SportBusiness, 2018; F1, 2020b), academic research investigating the sport is limited (Pflugfelder, 2009; Hassan, 2011b). This section reviews the literature covering the historical, marketing, and sociological research that relates to women racing drivers. It is comprised of two parts: the first establishes the position of women racing drivers in the sport between the 1890s and 1910s, a period when the sport was in its infancy and not reflective of the sport that is seen today (low speed, racing on roads, and testing the reliability of the vehicles (Henry *et al.*, 2007)); and the second part examines motorsport as we recognise it today (high speed, technologically advanced, and track-, circuit-, or dirt-based (Henry *et al.*, 2007)) and covers the themes found in the limited literature relating to women racing drivers. Although it is beyond the scope of the current study it is also worth noting that other academic motorsport studies have relevance to the study of women racing drivers. For example, an investigation into the factors affecting career length of non-winning F1 drivers (Mourao, 2018), nepotism within F1 (Groothuis and

Groothuis, 2008) and masculinities associated with race cars (Fleming and Sturm, 2011; Boutle, 2012). Likewise, the phenomenon of grid girls in the sport has been examined (Tippett, 2019).

### **2.5.1. Women racing drivers: 1890s-1910s**

The history of women racing in motorsport has been examined through popular histories and academic study, providing insights into the development of women racing and exploring motorsport culture (Pflugfelder, 2009). 'Popular' books, such as those written by Bullock (2002) and McCarthy (2007), provide a basic and nostalgic understanding of the history of women racing drivers. Likewise, Bouzanquet (2009) provides one of the most comprehensive lists of women racing drivers from 1888 to 1970. Despite being stylised for commercial sales and not academically written, these books not only highlight an interest in the topic of women in motorsport but also provide useful research.

Collectively, academics agree that motor racing has been male-dominated from its inception (Scharff, 1991; O'Connell, 1998; Shackelford, 1999; Sloop, 2005; Charters, 2006; Cuneen *et al.*, 2007; Clarsen, 2008; Williams, 2014; Matthews and Pike, 2016). However, the way in which women have negotiated their position into the driving seat has been viewed differently by academics. Both Scharff (1991) and O'Connell (1998) discuss women racing drivers as a spectacle (i.e. that women racing drivers were seen as a novelty) and focus on their marginalisation in racing. Scharff (1991) articulated that American women racing drivers were seen as a problem when it came to racing cars in the 1900s. In part, this was due to the fact they did not fit the gendered ideals of the time and invaded the male domain and, in doing so, created tension (Scharff, 1991). Likewise, O'Connell (1998) argued that in British society, the car was seen through accepted ideals of masculinity and femininity. Changes in general car designs for commercial and safety purposes, meant cars were seen to become feminine and less manly; in contrast, race cars were designed to maximise speed and danger to maintain the masculine allure of racing (O'Connell, 1998). Thus, women racing drivers were viewed to be at odds with motorsport. Alternatively, Williams (2011; 2014) explored the chequered history of women at Brooklands racetrack, looking at women's impact on both the construction of the track and racing. She argued the importance of women within

the development of motorsport in Britain is often overlooked in the history of motorsport (both within racing and broader perceptions of the sport) (Williams, 2014). This contradicts the portrayal of women racing drivers as a spectacle and their passive position depicted by Scharff (1991) and O'Connell (1998).

In addition to the historical position of women racing drivers, studies have examined the attire worn by these pioneering women, providing insight into their adaptability within the constraints of both society and motorsport (Lane, 1987; Burman, 2000; McKinlay, 2019). By adapting their clothing, women racing drivers challenged the ideals of society during the Victorian and Edwardian eras (McKinlay, 2019). Furthermore, research has shown that women racing drivers during this period showed that the female body could be active (challenging the gender norms of the time) and negotiated their position within the sport's culture, embracing the speed and dangers associated with racing (Burman, 2000).

### **2.5.2. Women racing drivers: From the 1920s to the present day**

Much of the current literature on women racing drivers from the 1920s to 2010s pays particular attention to American motorsport (e.g. Scharff, 1991; Shackelford, 1999; Sloop, 2005; Charters, 2006; Cuneen *et al.*, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Pflugfelder, 2009; Ross, Ridinger and Cuneen, 2009; Neilson, 2013; McKinlay, 2019); however, other countries do feature in research, these include the UK (e.g. Cullen, 2012; Matthews and Pike, 2016), Canada (e.g. Charters, 2006), Sweden (e.g. Tolvhed, 2017) and Australia (e.g. Clarsen, 2011). It is worth noting, as previously discussed, that American motorsport has a different culture compared to other Western countries due to how the sport developed there (Henry *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, during the early development of the sport, the experiences of American and British women and their relationships to cars varied as British women engaged in work with cars and technology during WWI when men were called up to fight (Clarsen, 2008). Thus, consideration of cultural differences is required when understanding the findings from American studies.

Examining how the position of women racing drivers has developed in the sport from the early forms to the current day, Charters (2006) and Matthews and Pike (2016) have examined the experiences of women racing drivers up to the past decade

(2010s). Charters (2006) explored the experiences of Canadian women racing from the 1950s to the early 2000s. He suggested that the limited number of women reaching the top ranks within the sport was due to several factors: social attitudes towards women during the early years of racing, a lack of promotion of women drivers, fewer women having the financial independence to participate compared to men, and finally, women lacking decision-making positions within the sport (Charters, 2006). Similarly, as previously mentioned above, Matthews and Pike (2016) investigated coverage of British women racing drivers from the 1880s to 2010 in a British newspaper. Their findings reflected those of Williams (2014) and Charters (2006), providing a chronological description of the development of British motorsport and the position of women within it, linking their place to the societal expectations of women of the times. Focus is given to the interwar period, 1918-1938, when women's racing was at its peak in Britain (Williams, 2014; Matthews and Pike, 2016). In WWI, the gender norms of women and cars changed due to the national requirement of women to fulfil roles with cars that men previously held, such as driving ambulances, taxis, and lorries, and becoming mechanics (Matthews and Pike, 2016). However, post-WWII, many of the advances women had made in society from fulfilling such roles were removed and women were instead encouraged by the government to focus on domestic matters and to have children (Matthews and Pike, 2016). Women competing in motorsport was at odds with this message due to the dangers involved in the sport and the concern that a death of a women racing driver would damage the recovery of the sport after WWII (Bullock, 2002; Matthews and Pike, 2016). Furthermore, Matthews and Pike (2016) suggested that the rapid commercialisation and professionalisation that occurred in motorsport after 1945 compounded the male-dominance of the sport. Concurring with Charters' (2006) conclusions, they argue that marginalisation of women in British motorsport continues today, in part, due to the past actions taken towards women racing drivers. These included the propagation of gendered perceptions within society, limiting access to the sport, the banning of women participating on racetracks, and limiting membership of racing clubs (Matthews and Pike, 2016).

Academic investigation has also explored the association of masculinities and motorsport. One such investigation is Shackleford's (1999) exploration into the fraternal relationships within NASCAR's structure. Focusing on the pit stop, he

argued, using Clawson's (1989) notion of fraternal construction, that NASCAR had internalised masculinities through its structure and outward portrayal of the sport (Clawson, 1989 cited in Shackleford, 1999). Furthermore, pit stops embody rituals of masculine social conduct and promote the male fraternity, through technology and the intense work (Shackleford, 1999). His approach provides an interpretive strategy for exploring gender positions in motorsport, however, with more women in the sport (at the time of his writing, there were no female NASCAR drivers) the 'fraternity' may not be as relevant today. Taking a broader perspective than Shackleford (1999), Pflugfelder (2009) explored gender and the race car, using Merleau-Ponty (1962), Young (1990) and Haraway's (1991) understandings of the body. He argued that women racing drivers' experiences and identities could be understood from three perspectives; "the body beyond the vehicle, the body with the vehicle, and the body in the vehicle" (Pflugfelder, 2009, p. 414). He suggests that despite the gender neutrality notions that surround motorsport, the discourses that frame women drivers are not egalitarian, and women are constantly negotiating their position against the domination of men. He concluded that, ultimately, women drivers experience representations of their 'femininity' throughout their racing (Pflugfelder, 2009), a viewpoint that will be useful within this thesis in understanding the current representations of women racing drivers.

A small number of studies have examined the experiences of women racing drivers, focusing on a particular driver (Sloop, 2005; Cullen, 2012; Neilson, 2013; Tolvhed, 2017), a series (Matthews and Pike, 2016), or national group of racing drivers (Kochanek *et al.*, 2021). These provide insights into the subculture of motorsport and how women have (re)negotiated their place in the sport. Research into Fay Taylour (Cullen, 2012) and Ewy Rosqvist (Tolvhed, 2017), who raced during the 1950s and 1960s, respectively, highlighted their independence and determination to pursue motorsport. Similarities exist between the methodological approaches of the two studies ensuring triangulation of accounts; Cullen (2012) combined Taylour's autobiographical letters and state security files, and Tolvhed (2017) used Rosqvist's autobiography, alongside press coverage. Unlike Cullen (2012), Tolvhed (2017) conducted interviews with Rosqvist to ascertain her perspectives on events, providing a unique point of view. Both cases highlighted that women who threatened the dominance of men on the racing track were subjected to restricting



consequences being imposed on them. Taylour's success led to the banning of women from speedway racing (Cullen, 2012) and Rosqvist's performances in rallying were portrayed by the media in ways that reinforced her femininity and heterosexual desirability, rather than focusing on her rallying achievements (Tolvhed, 2017). It is worth noting that Tolvhed (2017) highlighted Rosqvist's ability to use being a woman to her advantage in PR and on-track attention, without allowing her gender to define her as a racer. A relevant point for this thesis is to explore if portrayals of women racing drivers over the past ten years, and their feelings of control over their representations, reflect those of Rosqvist.

The experiences and representations of women racing drivers from the past 20 years have also been examined within academic research. Case studies include: NASCAR driver Deborah Renshaw (Sloop, 2005) and Indy Car and NASCAR driver Danica Patrick (Neilson, 2013). Matthews and Pike (2016) also interviewed three drivers from the Formula Woman series and most recently Kochanek *et al.* (2021) interviewed eight current and former professional American racing drivers. These racing drivers have experienced racing differently from their historical counterparts, as societal norms of women have evolved, allowing more acceptance in the sport (Neilson, 2013). Patrick's apparent control of her representation in the press (Neilson, 2013), appears to adhere to Bruce's (2016) notion of 'pretty and powerful'. Likewise, Matthews and Pike (2016) found that drivers used their *other* status to generate sponsorship and PR. Likewise, Kochanek *et al.* (2021) found that women racing drivers were empowered by the idea of being one of very few women in the sport, however they articulated that women racing drivers were also disempowered by their gender in the sport.

Although Matthews and Pike (2016) explored the media's impact on the longevity of Formula Woman they neglected to investigate the experiences of women racing drivers with the media and how representations had affected them. Moreover, their study did not explore why the women racing drivers they interviewed felt that they received the same amount of coverage as their male peers, nor did they investigate the volume of coverage given to women racing drivers compared to their male peers, a point this thesis addresses.

Taking an alternative approach, Sloop (2005) analysed the public discourse through the media relating to Renshaw, covering two controversies during her career; a protest lodged by her male peers, forcing her disqualification, and her involvement in the instant death of a fellow driver in an on-track accident. Sloop (2005) presents his ideological views of the race car as a prosthetic of the body and a discursive object, allowing for both agency and the structure of the sport to play a part in women racing driver's current position. He suggests that although gender may not be visible within the car, gender ideals are implied through other means, including the media. Most recently, Howe (2022, p. 454) conducted a cultural examination of barriers to women racing drivers competing in F1, arguing that there were five main barriers leading to the exclusion of women racing drivers in F1: "historical and current attitudes, assumed physical and mental inferiority, sexualisation, money, and representation and (in)visibility". Although Howe provides useful insights, her research was based upon conjecture.

Of the scholars who have investigated the subject of women racing drivers between 1920 and 2010, only Matthews and Pike (2016), Tolvhed (2017) and Kochanek *et al.* (2021) have interviewed women racing drivers; a perspective that is less often seen in sports media research (McClearen, 2018). This thesis addresses this gap in the research by interviewing women drivers and including their perspectives on their experiences in the sport, adding to the scholarship about women and motorsport.

Limited attempts have been made to understand the media's representation of women racing drivers and those that exist are in turn limited in the range of sources used. Cuneen *et al.* (2007) and Ross, Ridinger and Cuneen (2009) explored the advertising images of women racing drivers in ephemera, using Indianapolis 500 programmes from 1977 to 2006. Cuneen *et al.* (2007) highlighted that there was a significant shift in the portrayal of women racing drivers in 2003. Before that year, depictions of women racing drivers were strong/athletic and professional; however, post-2003, the images moved to be sexualised and objectified. This finding is at odds with sports media research that suggests that sexualisation of sportswomen is reducing, with a greater focus on athletic performance (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). The studies provide an insight into how women drivers are perceived visually; however, they fail to explore how the drivers are discussed within the printed racing

programmes. Moreover, advertisement images are designed to sell a product and are chosen to maximise commerciality, which may impact on the representation (Godoy-Pressland, 2016). Nevertheless, they provide useful insights into representations of American women racing drivers, where there have been more women racing at a high level, compared to Europe.

In the UK, the limited research about media representations of women in motorsport shows how women were marginalised in printed media. For example, Matthews and Pike (2016) found the dominant views in *The Times* group newspapers' reporting ranged from: the opposition and *othering* of women drivers; focusing on women as taking or fulfilling a supportive role to male drivers; and the enduring view that women cannot race in a male sport due to physical and mental differences. However, the analysis of newspaper articles excluded the 15 years between 1986 and 1999, due to a lack of access to resources. Importantly, during this period feminist values entered the mainstream media (McRobbie, 2009) and the media's reporting of women racing drivers may have altered at this time as a result of societal attitudes towards women changing. However, this is unknown due to a lack of access to the data. Despite this gap in the newspaper data, Matthews and Pike (2016) have conducted the most comprehensive media analysis of women racing drivers to date. Overall, research conducted on the subject of women racing drivers has not explored how the media represents current racing drivers, as the existent studies have not investigated beyond the year 2010. Nor have studies provided a comparison between how different publications in the printed media have represented women racing drivers, which this thesis will address by comparing six different British newspapers.

## **2.6. Summary**

Academics have argued that sport is a site where men and masculinities are deemed to be superior to women and femininities (Pfister, 2010) and where gender differences are constructed (Scruton and Flintoff, 2013; Cooky, 2018a). Historically, sport sociologists agree that women were actively encouraged not to participate in sport through biological reductionism and the 'fragility myth' (Hargreaves, 1994; Vertinsky, 1994). However, today, women are actively encouraged to participate in

sport, with more sports accessible to women than ever before (Cooky, 2018a). Despite this, it has been argued that the structure of sport (see methodology) reinforces patriarchal ideologies and is one of the last social institutions where sex-segregation commonly occurs (Channon *et al.*, 2016; Bowes and Kitching, 2021b). However, several sports, such as motorsport, are sex-integrated and thus described as gender-neutral, providing an opportunity for women to challenge the patriarchal norms of sport (Dashper, 2013; Channon *et al.*, 2016). Despite this, research has shown that obstacles for a genuinely egalitarian experience for women continue to exist within sex-integrated sports (Channon *et al.*, 2016; Silva, 2018).

The media's representation of women's sport and women athletes shapes the ideals, stereotypes and our understanding of women in sport (Cooky, 2018b). It has been found that sports media reinforces sport as a male preserve (Messner, 1988) and collectively, academics agree that sports media marginalises and underrepresents sportswomen (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). Research has tended to find the same patterns in how sportswomen are represented by the media (Bruce, 2016); however, there is disagreement among academics over the prevalence and interpretation of the reporting techniques used by the media. Moreover, recent evidence suggests that the British printed press's coverage of sportswomen is becoming more equitable (Schmidt, 2018; Bowes and Kitching, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019) which contradicts the findings of a number of academics (Godoy-Pressland, 2014a; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019).

Findings suggest that the perceived gender appropriateness of a sport affects the representations of sportswomen in sports media (Allen and Frisby, 2017). Furthermore, during international competitions, home-nation media diverges from its typical framing of sportswomen to serve nationalist ideologies (Bruce, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Several limitations exist within sports media research; scholars have rarely investigated the experiences of sportswomen in relation to sports media (e.g. Fink, Kane and LaVoi, 2014; Hardy, 2015; Matthews and Pike, 2016; Geurin, 2017; Tolvhed, 2017; Bowes and Bairner, 2018; Peeters, Elling and Sterkenburg, 2019; Kovacs and Doczi, 2020), and research into printed media rarely examines the differences between types of reporting, e.g. broadsheet vs tabloid (Martin *et al.*, 2017; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Furthermore, existing research has tended to focus on sports, such as football, Olympic sports, and tennis

(Hedenborg and Pfister, 2015), with limited studies on motorsport (e.g. Matthews and Pike, 2016).

Research investigating women racing drivers in motorsport suffers from several limitations, one being that the majority of studies focus on American motorsport (e.g. Scharff, 1991; Shackelford, 1999; Sloop, 2005; Charters, 2006; Cuneen *et al.*, 2007; McCarthy, 2007; Pflugfelder, 2009; Ross, Ridinger and Cuneen, 2009; Neilson, 2013; McKinlay, 2019), with comparatively limited research on British motorsport (e.g. O'Connell, 1998; Cullen, 2012; Williams, 2014; Matthews and Pike, 2016). The perceived male-dominance of the sport is confirmed by existing research. For example, male-dominance is evident through the historical development and gendered ideals of the sport, associations of masculinity with the race car, and reproduced ideals through attire and images of women racing drivers.

Limited studies have examined how sports media has represented women racing drivers, and the focus of such research does not extend beyond 2010 (e.g. Cuneen *et al.*, 2007; Ross, Ridinger and Cuneen, 2009; Matthews and Pike, 2016). Further, existent research covers a minimal range of sports media sources, with only one study to date (Matthews and Pike, 2016) providing a content analysis of a newspaper group. Moreover, studies exploring the experiences of women racing drivers tend to focus on reported reactions within the media and not direct interviews with the drivers (e.g. Sloop, 2005; Neilson, 2013; Tolvhed, 2017). Finally, there is no current research into the experiences of active British women racing drivers and how sports media's representations of women racing drivers have affected them, with the most recent British study's data being over ten years old (Matthews and Pike, 2016), therefore this is a gap that this thesis seeks to fill. The next chapter will explore the methodological underpinnings of this current study.

## **Chapter 3. Lining up on the grid: Methodology and methods**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Methodology is not generally taken to be an exciting area, and those involved in researching gender may well wonder why they should take an interest in methodological problems rather than just getting on with the job [...] In seeking knowledge of gender through social research, feminists make decisions about how to produce and justify their knowledge, whether they do so intentionally or not, and we argue that these decisions matter. They affect what can be known and what gets to count as authoritative knowledge. Decisions about methodology are particularly powerful in the politics and practices of knowledge production.

(Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, pp. 8-9)

These words highlight the importance of methodology in research, especially for feminist research. This chapter explores the knowledge and decisions that have informed the design and methodology of this research. The project has evolved and developed from what was initially conceived, thus, within this chapter, I have highlighted these changes to explain these methodological decisions and developments of the research and the evolution of myself as a researcher.

This chapter is comprised of eight main sections. The first three position the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have shaped this thesis, provide a discussion of my positionality as a researcher within this study, and explains the decision-making processes in designing this research. The next three sections are related to the data sample, participant recruitment, data collection, and the analysis involved in this research. The final two sections examine strategies of trustworthiness and credibility, and issues of ethics and confidentiality. Issues and limitations of the methodology and methods used to mitigate and reduce their impact will be discussed throughout.

### **3.2. Theoretical Underpinning and Conceptual Framework**

This section examines the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual framework that shaped this thesis. The section discusses the influence of feminism, representation and framing, and the work of Bourdieu on the research. Finally, my positionality and background are considered.

### **3.2.1. Feminism**

Underpinning my research is feminist theory and perspectives, which have influenced the topic of study and how the research was conducted and interpreted. It is difficult to provide a single definition of 'feminism' as there is a multitude of variations; however, the shared assumption in feminism is the advocacy for women's rights in a society where women are oppressed by the patriarchy, which privileges men (Müller, 1999; Birrell, 2000). In feminist research there is not a singular methodology or epistemology, instead there are multiple (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Harding (1987b, p. 3) defines epistemology as "a theory of knowledge", moreover she highlights that feminist researchers are concerned that traditional epistemologies have led to "the voice of science" being "a masculine one". To address these androcentric biases in scientific and sociological knowledge three major feminist epistemological perspectives emerged, namely (1) feminist empiricism, (2) feminist standpoint theory, and (3) feminist postmodernism (Harding, 1987a). A feminist standpoint epistemology is used as a guiding framework for this research as it is most suited to the subject for a number of reasons. Firstly, motorsport is a male-dominated environment which is monopolised by men in almost all aspects. Secondly, as discussed in the literature review, very little academic study has explored the voices of women racing drivers and their lived experiences in this environment. Finally, the nature of this research considers the situated knowledge and production of knowledge surrounding women racing drivers, which aligns most closely with the feminist standpoint epistemology.

Feminist standpoint epistemologies draw on the Marxist beliefs that an individual's lived experiences have shaped, informed, and created their knowledge and understanding of the society they inhabit (Hartsock, 1987). For standpoint feminists it is

A woman's oppressed location within society that provides fuller insights into society as a whole; women have access to an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of social reality than men do precisely because of their structurally oppressed location vis-à-vis the dominant group, or men.

(Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 10)

As such standpoint feminist epistemology privileges knowledge production from the lives of the women, and that research begins from this viewpoint (Doucet and

Mauthner, 2007). Sport sociologists have drawn upon this epistemological framework to investigate the experiences of sportswomen across a range of issues (Cooky, 2017). Feminist standpoint epistemology has also been used in research examining media representation of female athletes to understand perceptions of the representations from girls (see Krane *et al.*, 2011).

I entered this research aligned with this viewpoint: women are marginalised in society and institutions, such as sport and the media, due to existing power relations. Additionally, I believe that knowledge is determined through systems of power relations, notably patriarchy. Moreover, my desire is for equal opportunities and improved positions for sportswomen in sport as it currently exists, rather than to forge a separate sporting space for women or to create conflict between the sexes. Thus, I argue that my values align with those of liberal sports feminism (Hargreaves, 2002). Furthermore, it was important for my research to involve women racing drivers and journalists (both men and women) as participants and to provide a space for their voices to be heard. As such, my perspective has shaped this thesis, leading me to study women racing drivers, sports media, and privileging gender as the category of enquiry. Grounding this research in gender ideology has allowed for an understanding of how women racing drivers are seen within society and how their gender has shaped this position.

My theoretical framework evolved during the research. Birrell (2000, p. 62) provides an excellent summary of the evolution of theoretical frameworks using feminist theory and perspectives, describing the process thus:

Feminist theory offers an explanation of our lives within culture by attempting to abstract from concrete individual lives a general pattern of experience. Thus, theory is a framework for understanding, but it always develops within a particular cultural context and it is always provisional. Theory is never perfect, never complete, never proven. Instead, theory provides us with a starting point for our understanding but it begs to be expanded, contradicted, refined, replaced.

In addition my understanding of and engagement with feminism evolved. Growing up in the 1990s and early 2000s I had unconsciously embodied the post-feminist identity which McRobbie (2009, p. 21) summarises as:



The new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl. Indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom. There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific notions of cool, and more precisely, an uncritical relation to dominant commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past, in order to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure.

Admittedly, although I was aware of the existence of feminism and the debates that had occurred historically, I had believed feminism to be a movement of the past. I had accepted the negative stereotypes of feminists and not challenged these assumptions. It was not until I embarked on my academic journey in 2014 that I became aware of feminism in sport, and the need for it in the present day. As this research progressed, my understanding of the complex issues surrounding women, not only in sport but in society, grew as I read and engaged with various feminist perspectives, literature, and debates. As a result, I have transformed and embraced my identity as a feminist, in both my research and wider life.

### **3.2.2. Representation and framing**

One of the key concepts that this thesis examines is the representation of women motor racing drivers in British newspapers; thus, it is essential to understand that the representation of women racing drivers is more than just an account of the motor race they have competed in. Hall (1997b, p. 226) articulates that

Representation is a complex business and especially when dealing with 'difference', it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilises fears and anxieties [...] at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way.

He argues that within the media, many meanings can be derived from one representation; however, journalists use power ideology to 'fix' (or present) their preferred meaning to the audience (Hall, 1997a). Moreover, how cultures, groups or individuals are represented through *othering* and *difference* can be viewed as an exercise in hegemony or symbolic power where symbolic violence is exercised on the victims (Hall, 1997b). Furthermore, it is essential to understand how sporting events are presented in newspapers, this is often referred to as framing. Kian (2007, p. 4) describes framing as "a term regularly employed to describe the means through which journalists make sense of news events by selecting facts and embedding

them in storylines". For this thesis, it was essential to understand the notions of representation and framing to investigate how women racing drivers were positioned within media texts.

### **3.2.3. Bourdieu**

Alongside feminist theory, I drew upon Bourdieu's work (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) to explore the phenomena of women racing drivers' experiences with British newspapers and how sports media has represented them. Bourdieu's social theory (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) provides an approach to analyse and provide insights into the relationships between objective social constructs (structure), such as media and sport, and an individual's practice (agency). It is worth noting that unlike some theorists whose work is drawn upon in sports sociology, Bourdieu has directly used sport to explain the interactions between his concepts (for an example see Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 206-222).

Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* is comprised of the key tenets: habitus, field, capital, and practice (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Each of these tenets of the theory are symbiotic, and the interaction between them has been formally articulated as "[habitus](capital)+field=practice" (Giulianotti, 2016, p. 174). Thus, an individual's social practice depends on the interaction between their habitus and capital and the field they are occupying (Maton, 2013). Bourdieu (1977, pp. 214, n.1.) articulates habitus regarding disposition and explains the concept as:

It expresses first the *result of an organising action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *pre disposition, tendency, propensity or inclination*.

Moreover, Bourdieu (1990, p. 53) expands on this definition describing habitus as:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

Thus, habitus is the dispositions (tastes) of an individual and results from the complex interactions of human agency interacting with and being influenced by

various structures in society, often operating below the individual's self-awareness (Tomlinson, 2004).

The second key concept is that of the capital which an individual possesses. For Bourdieu, capital is the power in a specific field and, as a result, produces social hierarchy within that field (Laberge, 1995). Furthermore, he recognises that individuals hold different types of capital (such as economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) at varying levels (Giulianotti, 2016). As such, individuals can accrue sporting capital, for example a racing driver could gain capital due to their family's status in the sport, their success on the track or from their gender. In the most part gender capital for a woman in sport is not generally considered due to the patriarchal hierarchy that exists. However, a sportswoman's gender capital can in certain circumstances be considered greater than men's gender capital; for example, when diversity campaigns and positive discrimination are on the agenda.

The final element that informs an individual's practice is the field. Bourdieu's theorised concept of field is defined by Wacquant (1992, p. 16) as "a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)". Therefore, the field is the location of the social practice. In the case of this thesis the British media or motorsport is the field. In his writing, Bourdieu often refers to the field with the analogy of it being a game. Each field has a *doxa*, which is a set of ideals that are adopted, largely unquestioned, by both the dominant and subordinate groups within the field (Giulianotti, 2016). Moreover, the integrity of the *doxa* of a field will be defended by the dominant individuals within that field, and those in the minority may try to challenge and alter the *doxa* to their interests (Bourdieu, 1977).

Closely aligned to the field is what Bourdieu terms *illusio*, the "primordial investment in the social games" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.48); in layperson's terms it is the vested interest in participating in a field, which sustains the collective belief and participation in a field resulting from "the conjunctural relationship between a habitus and a field" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 228). For example, it is the actions and practice that a woman self-imposes on her body to achieve what she believes is the societal ideal of womanhood (such as choosing to wear makeup, go on a diet or shave body hair), which has been devised from the relationship of her constructed habitus and the

legitimised beliefs of the field (*doxa*). The *doxa* is informed by the fundamental divisions that exist in the social space, and attainment of these ideals increases the capital and honour that she possesses (Bourdieu, 2001). Thus, the interactions between habitus, field and capital are fruitful for research that investigates gender, and in this study will provide insights into the practice of women racing drivers and the media.

Bourdieu discusses at length the misrecognition of power an important concept for this thesis. He articulated that this misrecognition, known as *symbolic violence*, explains "how disadvantages within the field are systematically and harmfully imposed upon dominated social groups" (Giulianotti, 2016, p. 176). Symbolic violence is defined by Bourdieu (2001, pp. 1-2) as:

A gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling.

Bourdieu expanded on this concept of symbolic violence to explain how symbolic domination is reproduced through the misrecognition of power, He explained that the dominated "help to reproduce the conditions of oppression" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 217). An example would be women saying that women's sport is not exciting. Closely aligned to symbolic violence is what Bourdieu calls *alldoxia*<sup>11</sup>, a term he used to describe "the *heterodoxy* experienced as if it were the *orthodoxy*" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 321). In other words, Bourdieu suggests that an individual accepts the beliefs presented to them as the established norms of that field, even when they are not. Journalism is an example of a field that contains many *alldoxia* due to the large number of varying editor and ownership practices and beliefs that influence production. As discussed in the literature review, women are marginalised in both sport and the media and may be victims<sup>12</sup> of symbolic violence in both motorsport and the media. For this reason, symbolic violence and its related concepts are key for this thesis in understanding and exploring the representations of women racing drivers and the viewpoints of both journalists and women racing drivers.

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that in his later writings Bourdieu started to use the term *alldoxia* instead of misrecognition (Miller, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> I recognise the negative connotations of the word victim, however this is a term used by Bourdieu to explain the concept of symbolic violence and when I use the word throughout the thesis it is in relation to this Bourdieusian concept, unless stated otherwise.

It is worth noting that the work of Bourdieu has been criticised by some feminist scholars, who argue that his work "presents an ahistorical, androcentric worldview" (Thorpe, 2009, p. 492). However, despite the criticism of this work, many feminist scholars have recognised the potential for using Bourdieu's theory in feminist research (see Laberge, 1995; Skeggs, 2004; McLeod, 2005; Thorpe, 2010). Indeed, Bourdieu (2001, p.48) acknowledges that women are marginalised and dominated in society:

The point of honour, that particular form of the sense of the game [*illusio*] that is acquired through prolonged submission to the regularities and rules of the economy of symbolic goods, is the principle of the system of reproduction strategies through which men, the holders of the monopoly of the instruments of production and reproduction of symbolic capital, aim to secure the conservation or expansion of this capital—fertility strategies, matrimonial strategies, educational strategies, economic strategies, inheritance strategies, all oriented towards the transmission of inherited powers and privileges.

Moreover, he suggests that "women are excluded from all the public spaces [...] where the games are ordinarily considered to be the most serious ones of human existence, such as the games of honour, are [sic] played out" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.49). Moreover, Bourdieu (2001) explains that the use of symbolic power in sport and the media through symbolic production positions women in a 'double bind' to access more power within the sporting field. Thus, Bourdieu's theory can be used to understand relationships between gender and women's sports experiences (Brown, 2006).

Despite the minimal use of Bourdieu in feminist sports media studies, examples of his theory being applied in this context can be seen in the research of Metcalfe (2019) and Hovden and Von Der Lippe (2019). Bourdieu's concepts lend themselves well to this research as his work can position women in sport and media, with male-domination seen as symbolic and reproduced (Brown, 2006; Metcalfe, 2019). Additionally, his concepts can be applied to explain the gendered experiences of sportswomen in sport (e.g. Thorpe, 2010; Mennesson, 2012). For this thesis, his theory is applied to how and why women racing drivers are represented in British newspapers in specific ways and will thus help to understand their experiences.

Collectively, feminist and Bourdieusian (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) thinking shaped the research questions, methodological design, data collection methods and analysis of this research, which will now be discussed.

### **3.3. *Researcher perspective and background***

When commencing research, particularly qualitative research, it is assumed that the researcher brings their own experience and knowledge on the topic. Thus, researchers need to declare their positionality, as every stage of the research process is affected by it (Rowe, 2014). Moreover, "a researcher must be able to self-reflect on biases, social background, location and assumptions in order to 'maximise' objectivity" (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2015, p. 7). In feminist research reflexivity is an important concept, if not intrinsic (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007). Likewise, the notion of reflexivity was also important to Bourdieu. Bourdieu wrote extensively on reflexivity and he solidified his views in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Sweet (2020) articulates that although feminist standpoint theory and Bourdieu's notions of reflexivity can be viewed as antagonistic, consideration of both viewpoints is advantageous to research creating a more robust process of reflexivity. She articulates how the two can be integrated:

Drawing from feminist standpoint theory, I argue that a robust reflexivity should (1) grant epistemic privilege to marginal standpoints and (2) integrate alternative knowledge into the object of study. Drawing from Bourdieu, I argue that a robust reflexivity should also (3) account for the larger knowledge system in which standpoints are taken up.

(Sweet, 2020, p. 932)

Throughout the research process I kept a reflective journal in which I detailed my thoughts, ideas, and reflections on the work conducted, as well as my daily experiences. This was especially important during the national lockdowns when I had little contact with others.

Considering the importance of reflexivity, I need to detail my position within the research and my previous experiences that may have influenced my role as a researcher. Therefore, in addition to my positionality, I will briefly detail my background. Having already discussed my theoretical beliefs, I would like to acknowledge my position of privilege as a white middle-class millennial British

woman. Being born in Britain and growing up in London and the Southeast has afforded me many opportunities and life experiences. I was fortunate that these opportunities have culminated in me having the opportunity to study full-time as a mature student with a university-funded studentship in my chosen PhD topic, a position that I recognise many women around the world do not have. It is important to note that my position of privilege, habitus, and the capital that I have accumulated was advantageous for my research as it afforded me access to participants and networks that I would not otherwise have had.

My motivation to conduct this research stems from a vested interest in the topic. I have always been an avid motorsport and motosport<sup>13</sup> spectator, through attending races, watching via television, and reading the sports sections in newspapers. My interest in motorsport and motosport covers a broad range of disciplines: including rallying, rallycross, motocross, circuit racing, endurance, IndyCar, and NASCAR. Ever since I can remember, I always questioned why I could not see any women competing in motorsport's top levels, which was compounded when I discovered that there was no rule preventing women from competing. Ultimately, this has led me to investigate motorsport and to focus explicitly on women racing drivers.

Moreover, during my first year of university in 2014, Suzie Wolff became the first woman in over 20 years to participate in an F1 weekend at the British Grand Prix, inspired me to study women in motorsport academically. Following Wolff's retirement, she launched Dare to Be Different (D2BD), which I became a member of as I felt that I could assist women in the sport through research. I realised that there was very little academic work about women in motorsport and given my position and opportunity I wanted to change this.

Not only have I been interested in motorsport, but I have also participated in numerous sports throughout my life. Predominately my involvement in sport has been in male-dominated spaces. Competitively, I raced at a national level in dinghy sailing and, recreationally I enjoy snowboarding, mountain biking, skateboarding, surfing, and stand-up paddle boarding. When I was racing dinghies in the early noughties, it was noticeable that significantly fewer women were competing than

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<sup>13</sup> Motosport is often used to describe motorcycle sport and is different to motorsport as defined in this thesis which is that of four wheeled vehicles (see Chapter 2 for the definition of motorsport in this thesis).

men, and most of our coaches were men, an experience that enables me to draw parallels to the women racing drivers within this study. I would not be the person I am today without the experiences and opportunities that sport has provided me. Not only has it given me enjoyment, but sport has also provided me with invaluable life skills and has led me to the place I am today conducting this research.

My positionality undoubtedly has influenced the study. The position of privilege that I occupy and the choice of sports that I have been involved in and support, has not only influenced the area of research and the focus on women, but it also provided me access to the field. As such I had transferable capital, dispositions and resources that were aligned to the field of study. Kerr and Sturm (2019, p. 1139) suggest that this 'insider' position is advantageous to researchers as that:

Levels of distinction construct discernible hierarchies and bestow status onto researchers that can "act" as culturally literate in their readings, discussions, and demonstrations of forms of cultural capital valued by the sports and its members.

Moreover, my detailed knowledge of motorsport, experiences of competing in sport against men, and understanding technical motorsport terms helped me to build rapport and trust with the participants that would not have been as easy without these experiences. However, as a result of this insider status, I can often be blind to those on the outside, assuming that they understand motorsport to the same level of detail, so a concerted effort has been made to explain technicalities details of the sport throughout this thesis.

### **3.4. *Methodological approach and research design***

This study aimed to investigate the phenomenon of women racing drivers in Britain's newspapers through understanding how they have been represented between 2010 and 2020 and their personal experiences of sports media. Deciding how to approach the research was influenced by my feminist and Bourdieusian perspective. Feminist research methodology is difficult to define as there are different positions within feminism (Nielsen, 2019). Feminist researchers are not restricted to a single method, instead they employ various research methods including, where appropriate, mixing methods to best answer their research questions (Hesse-Biber



and Griffin, 2015). Likewise, media scholars argue that media research should use the most appropriate approaches to answer their research questions and embrace methodological pluralism (Dominick and Wimmer, 2003).

### **3.4.1. *Mixed-methods approach***

Non-feminist and feminist scholars have used mixed-methods research as it affords researchers the freedom to choose the most appropriate methods to best answer their research questions, rather than constraining them to either a qualitative or quantitative paradigm (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Defining mixed-methods research Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007, p. 123) suggest that it is:

The type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

Research sits upon a qualitative-quantitative continuum; thus, mixed-methods research can be qualitative-dominant, quantitative-dominant or equally mixed (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007). Traditionally, feminist research has predominantly employed qualitative methods and undervalued the benefits of quantitative methods (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2015). For example, quantitative research has highlighted that there is a gender pay gap (e.g. Office for National Statistics, 2022), that women experience high levels of violence (e.g. Bouillon-Minois, Clinchamps and Dutheil, 2020) and that women are underrepresented in many areas of society including sport (e.g. Sport England, 2020a). Thus, by embracing quantitative methods it enables an increased understanding of phenomena that a single methodology alone cannot offer (Creswell, 2018; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Therefore, adding a quantitative dimension to this study provided unique and valuable insights into the representation of women racing drivers and sportswomen in British newspapers in the 21st Century.

A mixed-methods research approach was warranted in this study to achieve a complete and comprehensive understanding of women racing drivers' representations within the British newspapers analysed. Furthermore, this allowed

for exploration of these women's position in the sport by giving voice to their experiences in relation to the statistical evidence (Elling, 2015), which could not have been achieved by solely taking a qualitative or quantitative approach (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2015; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Employing qualitative enquiry in addition to quantitative enquiry, allowed for an investigation of the complex relationships between gender, sports media (namely British newspapers), motorsport, and racing drivers. Additionally, qualitative enquiry provided insight into the contextualisation and rationale of the media analysis from the perspective of those who create the newspaper articles. Moreover, embedding quantitative enquiry within the research enabled statistical inference on how women racing drivers have been reported on over time within British newspapers (Elling, 2015), which was needed to assess whether coverage of women racing drivers had changed. Previous research investigating women racing drivers has not utilised mixed-methods to provide quantitative data; instead, they have used a multi-method approach combining qualitative media analysis with interviews (see Matthews and Pike, 2016; Tolvhed, 2017). Thus, this thesis uniquely contributes to understanding the representation of women racing drivers over the past decade (2010 to 2020).

The choice to conduct mixed-methods research was influenced by several factors. Firstly, I wanted to enable the voices of women racing drivers to be heard within my research and provide a space for their experiences to be understood; a viewpoint that several academics have suggested has been overlooked in sports media scholarship (e.g. Hardy, 2015; Bowes and Bairner, 2018; Peeters, Elling and Sterkenburg, 2019). This avenue of research could not be achieved through a media analysis alone and thus warranted a second research method (i.e. interviews). Secondly, a mixed-methods approach offsets the weaknesses associated with using a solely qualitative or quantitative approach, thus enabling more robust inferences within the study (Doyle, Brady and Byrne, 2016; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The associated weakness of qualitative inquiry is that the approach traditionally in academia is considered subjective because relationships in the data cannot be objectively<sup>14</sup> measured; whereas quantitative inquiry is often considered to be objective and allows for statistical inferences but is unable to capture

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<sup>14</sup> There are unsettled claims amongst feminist researchers over the use of objectivity and subjectivity in research due the androcentric bias in research (Nadeem, 2019).

subjective, complex meanings within data (Gratton and Jones, 2014; Doyle, Brady and Byrne, 2016; Smith and Sparkes, 2016b). As a result of combining the approaches, mixed-methods research benefits from drawing both subjective and objective conclusions from the data and facilitates the flexibility within its design to achieve this (Plano Clark *et al.*, 2011).

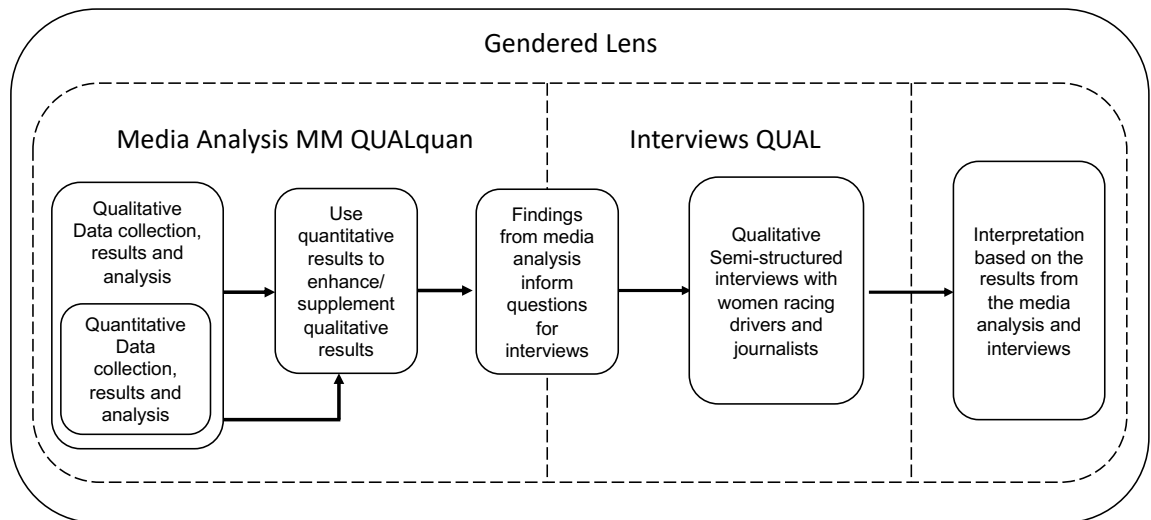
Further, using a multi-method approach facilitated triangulation. Triangulation allows a researcher to explore a phenomenon from multiple vantage points making more considered interpretations (Atkinson, 2011). During the research I used triangulation to compare the media analysis to the interviews and vice versa, to check for consistencies and inconsistencies within the collected data. Further, it allowed me to confirm or challenge statements made in the interviews.

In recent years within gendered research in sport sociology, which has been traditionally qualitative, the use of a mixed-methods approach has been increasingly called on to expand knowledge of the field. Using quantitative methods provides statistical evidence, which can support or contradict the themes found in sports media representations of sportswomen (Elling, 2015). In the same vein, sports media scholar Fink (2015) suggested that researchers have a responsibility to cover the qualitative and quantitative differences in sport media representations of female athletes. Moreover, sports sociologists who use the mixed-methods research approach can generate more significant levels of impact from their research and facilitate advancements in the potential for policy changes (Elling, 2015). Thus, by conducting mixed-methods research, my study is able to address the research questions in greater depth than using a single approach and provides further context and knowledge to the academic study of gender, sport, and sports media.

### 3.4.2. Designing of the mixed-methods research and the methods used

Numerous typology models covering a broad range of discipline orientations exist to assist with designing mixed-methods research, (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). However, it is important to understand that despite typologies providing a useful guiding framework or structure for researchers to approach their research problem, they should be viewed as a flexible tool rather than be rigidly implemented (Creswell and Clark, 2011). For the design of my research, I drew upon the typology model proposed by social science-orientated authors, Creswell and Clark (2011), as a starting point.

**Figure 2.** Illustration of the research design of this thesis. The theoretical and conceptual framework guides the study through a gendered lens.



**Note:** MM stands for mixed methods, "QUAL" denotes the dominant qualitative element, and "quan" denotes the quantitative supplementary component in line with Creswell and Plano Clark (2018).

The selection of research methods within a mixed-methods investigation is important as the correct choice enables the researcher to best answer the research questions (Creswell and Clark, 2007). For this investigation focused on understanding how women racing drivers have been represented in the British newspapers between 2010 and 2020, I chose to conduct a longitudinal media analysis that produced both quantitative and qualitative data, followed by qualitative interviews with sports journalists, press officers, and women racing drivers which were informed by the media analysis. Thus, the research design is a sequential qualitative-dominant design with quantitative data collection embedded into the media analysis to complement the qualitative findings. A visual representation of the

research design can be seen in Figure 2, which highlights the interconnections between the data interpretation and sequencing of the data collection.

#### **3.4.2.1. Media analysis**

Media analysis was the first method employed within this research. Media analysis is defined as “the examination, interpretation and critique of both the material content of the channels of media of communication and the structure, composition and operations of corporations that either own or control those media” (Cashmore, 2006, p. 254). The content that is examined covers a broad range of media: TV, radio, newspapers, video games, social media, websites, magazines (Altheide and Schneider, 2013). Media analyses allow us to examine sport away from the sporting field as “our understanding of sport is shaped by representations—by how it is photographed, filmed, written about and talked about.” (Horne *et al.*, 2012, p. 88). Feminist sport media analysis research tends to be categorised into one of the three research types: production, reception or content studies (Bruce and Antunovic, 2018). This research was predominantly a content study as its primary concern was the examination of newspaper articles, however through the inclusion of the interviews with journalists and women racing drivers the research also provides insight into the production of articles from those who create them and those who are the subject of the articles.

Qualitative textual analysis offers “unique points of access to the constitutive meanings and power relations of the larger worlds we inhabit” (McDonald and Birrell, 1999, p. 283). What is more, feminist academics argue that conducting qualitative textual analysis allows for the identification of the strategies used to frame or represent sportswomen and provides insights into the societal positioning of sportswomen (Bruce and Antunovic, 2018). Further, examining text allows for narratives to be understood. McDonald and Birrell (1999, p. 293) highlight the importance of narratives as they “are the means through which particular incidents are given meaning by particular producers”. Moreover, they point out that multiple narratives can be drawn from text and that these are subjective to the time and place where they were written, which “directs us toward an exploration of the conditions and contexts under and through which particular narratives are generated” (McDonald and Birrell, 1999, p. 294). Thus, in the case of this research the

examination of texts (newspaper articles) allows for an understanding of how motorsport is situated in society and whether gender relations are reflective of society.

Textual analysis can also examine the quantitative attributes of text. Quantitative analysis of text is generally called content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017). Neuendorf (2017, p. 1) defines content analysis as "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics". McKee (2003) points out that content analyses can provide useful information about trends and overviews of the representation of a phenomenon. Moreover, he emphasised that if a researcher wishes to create a debate outside of academia, "statistics have a greater perceived truth value" (McKee, 2003, p. 128). This viewpoint is important to consider, as the hoped outcomes of this research are to help facilitate change and debate surrounding the representation of women racing drivers.

A limitation of conducting textual media analyses is that the researcher may misinterpret the original meanings and intent that the author had assumed (Gratton and Jones, 2014). Previous commentary on sports media research has highlighted that there is little investigation into the producers of articles to understand their intentions and motivations (Sherwood *et al.*, 2017). Hence conducting interviews with journalists allows for their perspectives and motivations for creating the articles to be understood. Moreover, media analyses fail to understand how those women who participate in the sport experience their reality and what the impact of such representations in the media has on them (Trunečka, 2022), a point that this research addresses by interviewing women racing drivers.

#### **3.4.2.2. Interviews**

The second method used in this research was interviews. Unlike the media analysis where the articles existed before this research commenced (a secondary source), an interview is an interaction between the researcher and participant producing new data (a primary source). Conducting interviews in qualitative research facilitates an opportunity for researchers "to create a conversation that invites the participant(s) to tell stories, accounts, reports and/or descriptions about their perspectives, insights, experiences, feelings, emotions and/or behaviours in relation to the

research question(s)” (Smith and Sparkes, 2016a, p. 103). Thus, conducting interviews enables researchers to examine the area of investigation in greater detail and to a deeper extent than other research methods as interviews provide rich and thick description. This rich and thick data allows for investigation into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a phenomena providing an explanation rather than just a description of it (Gratton and Jones, 2014).

Moreover, Cleland, Dixon and Kilvington (2019, p. 73) argue that interviews go further than this as “they can empower participants in a way that is conducive to the generation of in-depth qualitative data that would be difficult to achieve via any other means”. For these reasons interviews were the most suitable method for this research. By conducting interviews, I gained invaluable insight into the participants' experiences and I was able to explore understandings of the research topic from multiple viewpoints (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). In addition, interviews allowed me to gather detailed information from journalists about why and how they approach writing articles about women’s racing in the way they do and to explore their viewpoints on the topic. Further, as this research sought to understand how women racing drivers have experienced the media and their views on the representations the media has created, this could not be gathered by any other means than an interview.

Interviews come in various forms and sit along a continuum (Smith and Sparkes, 2016a). There are four main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, unstructured and focus groups (Gratton and Jones, 2014). For this research semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate as they allowed me to target the drivers' and journalists' experiences in motorsport and the media, providing a flexible framework for questioning, allowing for discussion and interaction with each interviewee (Sparkes and Smith, 2012; Gratton and Jones, 2014; Patton, 2015; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019). Moreover, this format allowed me to explore with the participant ideas and thoughts that emerged that were not part of the initial interview guide, such as the impact of local media on national newspaper reporting. Structured interviews would not have allowed for such exploration of points raised by the interviewees (Patton, 2015; Cleland, Dixon and Kilvington, 2019). Likewise, unstructured interviews would not have been suitable as the differing questions and

focus of the interviews would have made comparison of the experiences and decisions of participants difficult (Patton, 2015).

### **3.5. Gathering the media data**

This section examines the construction of the media analysis sample. Firstly, the decision-making processes are discussed, including the rationale for selecting the newspapers used in this research and the sample's timeframe (2010 to 2020). Following this, the data collection procedures are explained.

#### **3.5.1. Constructing the sample**

The media analysis of the British newspaper representations of women racing drivers for this study uses a purposive sample of six national daily British newspapers and their Sunday counterparts. The selected newspapers are two tabloids (*The Sun/The Sun on Sunday* and *Daily Mirror/Sunday Mirror*), two mid-market newspapers (*Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday* and *Daily Express/Sunday Express*) and two 'broadsheets' (*The Guardian/The Observer* and *The Times/The Sunday Times*).

British national newspapers are most commonly defined as newspapers based in London and available across the UK (Cole and Harcup, 2010). The British newspaper industry is unique in the world as it is highly competitive and less restrained compared to other nations, in part due to the newspapers being operated by public companies and the culture of nationalism in British newspapers which is made possible by the nation's size and transport links (Tunstall, 1996; Cole and Harcup, 2010). Furthermore, British national newspapers have been shown to hold significant wider power through creating and shaping societal norms and deviants (Millington and Wilson, 2016). British national newspapers are organised into three distinct tiers, tabloids, mid-market and broadsheets (Cole and Harcup, 2010). Tabloids were traditionally the redtop newspapers, which historically focused more on pictures than text and provided ample space for sport; they are aimed at the lower socio-economic groups (Cole and Harcup, 2010). Mid-market newspapers target the middle class and focus on more text and 'serious' news than tabloids (Cole and Harcup, 2010). Finally, broadsheets, more commonly called 'qualities', are



targeted at the upper socio-economic class and intellectuals and are generally focused on text and debate (Cole and Harcup, 2010). However, qualities still cover, albeit to a lesser extent than other types of newspapers, popular culture, sports or human interest stories (Cole and Harcup, 2010). One common feature is that all newspapers have dedicated sports sections or pull-outs. Despite the rise of the internet and online newspapers and a decline in print newspaper demand, recent research has found that, on average, in Britain, 85.5% of the total time spent engaging with news is through printed newspapers compared to 11.5% online (Thurman, 2018).

Furthermore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has significantly affected print newspaper circulations due to lockdown restrictions, on average daily print newspapers were read for 1hr 40 mins and Sunday editions 1hr 24 mins (Newsworks, 2020). Moreover, the print editions of British national newspapers and their Sunday counterparts have a readership<sup>15</sup> of 36.3 million adults each week (PAMCo, 2021b). Thus, print editions of British newspapers still warrant investigation in their representation of sportswomen due to their continued relevance in today's society.

The newspapers selected for this study were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, to understand how women racing drivers were represented within British newspapers, it was essential to choose newspapers with a nationwide circulation during the sample period of 2010 to 2020; previous research on women racing drivers has examined *The Times Group* only up to 2010 (Matthews and Pike, 2016). Secondly, the selected newspapers provide a balanced representation of the political ideologies and owners within the British newspaper industry; this was important as both can influence the content provided. Thirdly, the newspapers in the sample were aimed at readers of different socio-economic groups and demographics. Finally, very little research has examined the effect of newspaper type (e.g. tabloid vs broadsheet) in the representations of sportswomen (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). The criteria used to choose this research's sample of newspapers is reflective of those used in previous studies that have examined sportswomen in British

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<sup>15</sup> The readership of a newspaper is different from the circulation, as circulation is the figure relating to paid copies, whereas readership is the predicted number of people who read the newspaper as most newspapers will be read by more than one person (PAMCo, 2021a).

newspapers (e.g. Dashper, 2018; Domeneghetti, 2018; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Lake, 2020), thus ensuring a balanced and targeted review of articles. Table 1 shows the key characteristics of the selected newspapers and their Sunday counterparts.

**Table 1.** Key characteristics of the newspaper sample.

| <i>Newspaper</i>  | <i>Circulation<br/>(Average per<br/>issue)</i> | <i>Social<br/>group*</i> | <i>Ownership</i>              | <i>Political<br/>ideology of<br/>newspaper</i> | <i>Female<br/>readership</i> |
|---|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| <b>Qualities</b>  |  |                          |                               |  |                              |
| <b><i>The Guardian<br/>and The<br/>Observer</i></b>       | 132,341<br>156,217                             | ABC1                     | Guardian<br>News and<br>Media | Fairly<br>left wing                            | 50.4%                        |
| <b><i>The Times<br/>and The<br/>Sunday<br/>Times)</i></b> | 368,929<br>645,108                             | ABC1                     | News UK                       | Slightly<br>right-<br>wing                     | 48.9%                        |
| <b>Mid-Market</b>   |  |                          |                               |  |                              |
| <b><i>Daily Mail and<br/>The Mail on<br/>Sunday</i></b>   | 1,169,241<br>967,043                           | ABC1/C2<br>DE            | DMG Media                     | Very<br>right-<br>wing                         | 55.2%                        |
| <b><i>Daily Express<br/>and Sunday<br/>Express</i></b>    | 296,079<br>252,733                             | ABC1/C2<br>DE            | Reach PLC                     | Fairly<br>right-<br>wing                       | 51.9%                        |
| <b>Tabloids</b>   |  |                          |                               |  |                              |
| <b><i>The Sun and<br/>The Sun on<br/>Sunday</i></b>       | 1,250,634<br>1,042,193                         | C2DE                     | News UK                       | Fairly<br>right-<br>wing                       | 43.6%                        |
| <b><i>Daily Mirror<br/>and Sunday<br/>Mirror</i></b>      | 451,466<br>367,244                             | C2DE                     | Reach PLC                     | Fairly<br>left<br>wing                         | 46.9%                        |

Source: Circulation for Jan 2020 prior to Covid-19; (ABC, 2020): Social group; (Ofcom, 2019): Ownership; (Newsworks, 2019): Political ideology terminology as per source: (YouGov, 2017) Female readership:(PAMCo, 2021b).

\*Shows ABC1/C2DE if there was no significant difference (3% variance) between results indicating no clear social group.

The media analysis examined the timeframe of 2010 to 2020 for several reasons. Firstly, the literature review highlighted a gap in the current research as no research has examined British newspaper’s representations of women racing drivers since 2010. The most recent study exploring the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers examined articles up to July 2010 (Matthews and Pike, 2016).

Secondly, since 2010 there has been an increase in women racing drivers (Motorsport UK, 2020f), with several British women competing in the top levels of motorsports during this period. These women racing drivers include Susie Wolff (who drove an F1 car during a race weekend in 2015 and 2016), Jamie Chadwick (who was a 2019 WSeries Champion and Williams F1 test driver), and Catie Munnings, Sarah Moore, Louise Cook, Esmee Hawkey, Jessica Hawkins, Alice Powell, Katherine Legge, Pippa Mann, Charlie Martin and Abbie Eaton (MotorSport, 2021). Finally, during the 2010s, there has been a concerted effort to increase women's participation in sports; this is evident from online campaigns, such as #thisgirlcan, #fitgotreal (Sport England, 2020b) and #likeagirl (Procter & Gamble, 2020). Motorsport's initiatives to encourage women into the sport pre-dated these campaigns. As previously discussed, in 2009, the FIA formed the Women in Motorsport Commission. More recently, campaigns to encourage women and girls into the sport have included the FIA Girls On Track initiative, launched in 2018, and Dare to Be Different (a non-profit), launched in 2016 (Motorsport UK, 2020b).

Furthermore, motorsport has seen the formation of two new racing series: the female-only WSeries launched in 2019 (WSeries, 2020b) and Extreme E, which has a 50:50 ratio of men and women drivers per team and is the first fully gender-equal series (Extreme E, 2020). Therefore, an 11-year sample period (2010 to 2020) was chosen to compare the coverage of the WSeries' first and second seasons. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the second season of the WSeries did not happen (WSeries, 2022). Despite the WSeries being cancelled, I chose to continue collecting the data for this period as it provided a valuable opportunity to understand how the pandemic affected the coverage of women racing drivers.

Initially, it was planned that this research would compare the reporting of women racing drivers in newspapers and motorsport-specific magazines. However, during the data collection, it became apparent there would be a more significant benefit to collect a sample of articles about men racing drivers from the same newspapers as the women. This change enabled an understanding of how representations of women racing drivers compared to male racing drivers in British newspapers. Furthermore, it was evident from the literature review that little academic attention has been given to understanding how male racing drivers are represented in British newspapers. Thus, if this data were not collected, conclusions could not have been

formed regarding whether female drivers were represented differently to their male counterparts. Therefore, articles were collected from the first year (2010) and the last year (2020) of the data sample period for male racing drivers from the same six newspapers and their Sunday counterparts for comparison. These two one-year periods were selected for the sample of articles about male racing drivers as previous research found the reporting of sportsmen remained relatively consistent in their coverage over time (Packer *et al.*, 2015; Schmidt, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019).

### **3.5.2. Collection of the media data**

For this research, I chose to analyse all relevant articles between 2010 and 2020 for women racing drivers and not use a constructed week(s) approach which is predominately used in media analyses. A constructed week is where researchers have used a determined seven-day period to approximate the content for a given period (e.g. month or year), which reduces the volume of articles over the research period (Luke, Caburnay and Cohen, 2011). However, this approach for data collection would have been problematic in this research. The main problem with this data collection practice is that the chosen sample periods can coincide with major sporting events, which previous research has identified can affect the coverage given to sports and sportswomen (Delorme, 2014). For example, Biscomb and Matheson's (2019) sampled weeks coincided with the men's football World Cup in 1994 and 2014 (FIFA, 2020) but not in 1984 or 2004. To minimise this effect, researchers can randomly select sample periods (e.g. Kaiser, 2018). However, the most effective practice is to remove the problem entirely by analysing all the relevant articles within the data collection period (e.g. Godoy-Pressland, 2014b; Peeters and Elling, 2015), which this current study has done.

To collect the newspaper articles, I used LexisNexis Academic. one of the most popular online databases for academic news sources which is well suited for thematic analysis of the articles' content (Deacon, 2007). Using an online database to gather newspaper articles has several benefits. The benefits include allowing Boolean searches to target relevant articles for systematically gathering large numbers of articles; this saves time for researchers by removing the need to trawl through microfilms and allows the researcher to remotely access articles (Deacon,

2007), which benefited this research during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data was collected by selecting the newspaper and then searching each keyword individually. The keywords such as racing driver, rally driver, motorsport, and motor racing, were searched in combination with other terms such as female/wom\*n/she/her. Known organisations, associations, racing series and prominent women racing drivers were searched for to maximise the number of articles found. This process was repeated for men racing drivers. Searching for racing series and drivers individually meant that there was no bias in the gender terming of the drivers, so if they were written about with no reference to their gender the articles would be picked up. This search strategy saturated the results, as further probing with alternative searches did not provide additional unique articles. In total, the searches for women racing drivers resulted in 14,028 articles. Examining these for duplicates and irrelevant articles<sup>16</sup> reduced the number of articles for analysis to 479. Each article was uploaded into NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2019) as a PDF file for qualitative coding.

For each newspaper article about women racing drivers and the selected sample about men racing drivers, a protocol sheet was completed; this formed the basis of the quantitative data for the study. This information was inputted into NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2019) as file attributes<sup>17</sup>. The design of the protocol sheet was influenced by Altheide and Schneider (2013) and previous research examining sportswomen in newspapers (Godoy-Pressland, 2014b; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; English *et al.*, 2019; Frideres and Palao, 2019). Once all the data was input into NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2019), the file attributes were exported to SPSS Statistics 27 (IBM, 2020) for quantitative analysis.

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<sup>16</sup> Articles were excluded from the data if they were a TV listing with no description, birthday announcements, the contents pages for an article, or were not about women racing drivers. For example, articles regarding male racing drivers' heterosexual partners were in the initial search but as they were not about women racing drivers they were excluded.

<sup>17</sup> File attributes is a term in NVivo (QSR International, 2019) to describe values that are given to each case (article), for example this included name of newspaper, date of article, journalist name, newspaper section. File attributes can then be exported directly from NVivo into Microsoft Excel (Microsoft, 2023) or SPSS (IBM, 2020).

### **3.6. Conducting interviews**

This section examines the recruitment and sampling procedures, participant sample and how the interviews were conducted with the participants. All the interviews were conducted after the media analysis had been completed, with the journalist interviews starting before the interviews with women racing drivers.

#### **3.6.1. Recruitment and sampling procedures**

The recruitment of interview participants for the study did not commence until ethical approval from the Northumbria University School of Art and Design Ethics Committee had been granted (22/06/2020). Although not planned initially, it became apparent that interviews with journalists who have written about women racing drivers would provide invaluable insights into the findings of the media analysis, as such an amendment was made to the ethics board to allow these interviews to occur. The Northumbria University School of Art and Design Ethics Committee approved the amendment on 13/05/2021. As a result, the interview participants were recruited from July 2021 to April 2022.

Purposive sampling was used to select the women racing drivers and journalists interviewed in this study. Purposive sampling allowed for the targeted selection of knowledgeable participants with experience as women racing drivers or journalists (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Furthermore, purposive sampling allowed the sample to be balanced as much as possible regarding women racing drivers' racing experiences and journalists' journalism experiences. For the sample of women racing drivers this meant that the sample included racing drivers who raced at different points during the sample period, rather than the sample being based on drivers who had been racing for the past several years only (i.e. the late 2010s). It was a suitable sampling strategy for this study, as the overall goal was not to generalise the findings to the whole population; instead, the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and opinions (Patton, 2015) of women racing drivers about the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers. In the same vein, having this targeted approach through purposive sampling was required to ensure that the journalists interviewed had a background

in reporting on motorsport and that there was a representation of different newspaper formats (i.e. not all reported for the same type of newspaper).

The purposeful sampling techniques used within this study were criterion sampling, snowball sampling, and opportunistic sampling. Creswell (2007) describes that criterion sampling requires participants to meet one or more prescribed features (e.g. woman racing driver or journalist), which can add to quality assurance. Snowball sampling is where current participants suggest other potential participants who could provide relevant information for the area of investigation, and opportunistic sampling involves taking samples at unexpected times (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

The participants for this research were recruited through a variety of means. Networking in person at motorsports events to recruit women racing drivers and journalists was not possible because of Covid-19 restrictions (see section 3.6.2. for more detail on the impact of Covid-19 on the research). Instead, I used my network developed during my involvement with the sport since 2015. In recruiting women racing drivers and journalists, I used motorsport organisations and clubs as gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are trusted members of a field and can provide a source of access to the field (Gratton and Jones, 2014). These gatekeepers passed on my information to women racing drivers and journalists that they believed to fit the research criteria. Some of the women racing drivers and journalists who contacted me also passed on my details to other women racing drivers leading to a snowball effect within my sample. I also posted on my social media channels that I was looking for volunteers to participate in the study (separate posts for journalists and women racing drivers) and provided my university email for potential participants to contact me for more information. The final way I approached participant recruitment was through contacting racing drivers and journalists that fitted the respective selection criteria and whom I had not already contacted via their website enquiry forms or LinkedIn. All potential participants were emailed more information about the research, including a copy of the participation information sheet and informed consent form. Only when informed consent was received from the participant an interview took place.

Qualitative research uses smaller samples than those required for a quantitative study, enabling the researcher to understand the phenomena in-depth (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Moreover, the goal of qualitative research is not generalisability, instead it is to gather deep, rich, and saturated data (Gill, 2020). Debate exists between academics on what constitutes a suitable sample size for saturation. Braun and Clarke (2021) suggest that sample size for sport and exercise research is irrelevant to determine data saturation when using reflexive thematic analysis (see data analysis in this chapter for more detail). They found examples of saturation occurring in sport and exercise research with between three to 16 interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Moreover, they state that saturation is subjective and the number of interviews required cannot be determined before data collection (Braun and Clarke, 2021). With this in mind, I took a flexible approach to the number of interviews I would conduct with women racing drivers, setting a minimum of five due to the supplementary nature of the interviews, with a view to expanding this number if required to ensure saturation. Unlike the interviews with racing drivers where an in-depth understanding of their gendered experiences was required, the interviews with sports journalists were needed to provide expert insights on the findings in the media analysis. As such fewer journalist participants were needed as this was not the main focus of the research.

### **3.6.1.1. Participant sample**

The selection criteria for racing driver participants were that they identified as a woman, were British or raced in Britain, had a minimum of an Interclub licence, and had actively raced for at least three years during 2010 to 2020. British motorsport licences are graded as follows<sup>18</sup> (highest grade last): Clubman, Interclub, National, and International (Motorsport UK, 2020d). There were several reasons for using racing drivers at interclub level or higher. One is that there are very few women racing drivers and including interclub-level racers increased the potential number of participants. In 2018<sup>19</sup>, 69.5% of licences issued in the UK were graded at Interclub or higher, whereas only 7.5% were graded at International level (Motorsport UK,

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<sup>18</sup> This was correct at the time of participation recruitment in 2021.

<sup>19</sup> The most current figures of percentage of licence types as of 18/07/21 were reported in the 2018 Motorsport UK Annual Report which is available on Motorsport UK's website- the most recent annual report available at the time of writing in 2021 (see Motorsport UK, 2019). A National B racing licence is equivalent to Interclub.



2019). In addition, women racing drivers who held racing licences that Motorsport UK did not issue or if Motorsport UK did not govern their discipline but had a racing licence or championship experience equivalent to Interclub or higher were accepted into the study.

**Table 2.** Key characteristics of the women racing driver sample.

|                        | <b>Motorsport Discipline*<br/>Rally, Circuit, Other</b> | <b>Racing Experience (Years)</b> |
|------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Racing Driver A</b> | Other   | 10+                              |
| <b>Racing Driver B</b> | Rally   | 6-9                              |
| <b>Racing Driver C</b> | Rally   | 6-9                              |
| <b>Racing Driver D</b> | Rally   | 6-9                              |
| <b>Racing Driver E</b> | Circuit   | 3-5                              |
| <b>Racing Driver F</b> | Rally   | 10+                              |
| <b>Racing Driver G</b> | Circuit   | 3-5                              |
| <b>Racing Driver H</b> | Circuit   | 10+                              |

Source: Data collected during interviews

\* The discipline is broad in overview to protect the identity of the women racing drivers as is the range of years' experience.

In total, eight women racing drivers were interviewed. They had varying motorsport experiences regarding the disciplines they had participated in and had an average of eight years' racing experience; see Table 2 for details on each participant. Furthermore, there was a broad range of the levels achieved in racing within the sample, as the spectrum of racing levels ranged from club to international racing. Thus, the research covered a broad range of experiences in such a complex sport. Moreover, the racing drivers came from various backgrounds with the women varying in age (average age was 32.5 years with the youngest being 24 and the oldest 52), social backgrounds and ethnicity. However, it is worth noting that in motorsport there is a widely acknowledged lack of diversity in relation to ethnicity, disability, and class, as well as gender, with an overwhelming majority of participants in motorsport being rich white Western men (FIA, 2020c; The Hamilton Commission, Morgan and Scarlet, 2021). The majority of the sample in this study identified as white British, but proportionally this sample had more representation of BAME than in motorsport. The *Hamilton Commission* reported that in F1 Black people made up

less than 1% of its workforce (The Hamilton Commission, Morgan and Scarlet, 2021).

**Table 3.** Key characteristics of the journalist sample

|                     | Sex    | Type of Journalism/<br>Role*              | Experience<br>(years) |
|---------------------|--------|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Journalist A</b> | Female | Newspaper Journalist                      | 5-10                  |
| <b>Journalist B</b> | Male   | Newspaper Journalist                      | 20+                   |
| <b>Journalist C</b> | Female | Freelance Journalist<br>and Press officer | 20+                   |
| <b>Journalist D</b> | Male   | Freelance Journalist<br>and Press officer | 20+                   |
| <b>Journalist E</b> | Male   | Newspaper Journalist                      | 20+                   |

Source: Data collected from interviews

\* The type of journalism/ role is broad in overview to protect the identity of the journalist

The journalists<sup>20</sup> selected to participate in the study had written about women racing drivers more than once between 2010 and 2020. The sample consisted of five journalists; two had experience as press officers. The journalists had written for qualities, mid-market and tabloid newspapers or motorsport-specific press with an average of 24 years' experience. The sample consisted of two women and three men, with an average age of 47. Table 3 details the journalists' demographics. All the journalists were white, this is not unexpected as previous research has highlighted this as a persistent issue in sports journalism (Spilsbury, 2021).

### **3.6.2. Data collection: Going digital during a global pandemic.**

The interviews with journalists were conducted between August 2021 and January 2022 and were on average 53 minutes long, and the interviews with women racing drivers were conducted between September 2021 and July 2022 and were on average 50 minutes long. All the interviews were conducted remotely, and the majority took place online (three interviews took place via telephone).

Going digital for conducting the interviews in the research was not what I had envisaged when mapping out the steps of the project. However, in March 2020 the

<sup>20</sup> Throughout the rest of this thesis, I refer to media specialists (journalists and press officers) as journalists for the ease of reading.

UK was affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic. As in many other countries, the UK's government-imposed restrictions upon day-to-day life and how people interacted with each other, which rendered the possibility of conducting face-to-face interviews a distant aspiration. This unexpected development posed several challenges regarding recruiting participants, building rapport with potential participants, and conducting interviews.

Conducting research online is a relatively new process in sports studies, so there are no set guidelines for conducting this type of research (Cleland, Dixon and Kilvington, 2019). Online interviews can be asynchronous (i.e. asking questions via an email or forum) or synchronous (i.e. video conferencing). Conducting interviews via a synchronous procedure, specifically a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) (such as Microsoft Teams, Skype, and FaceTime) was most suited to this research. It is argued that VoIP is the most similar to face-to-face interviews as the interviewer and interviewee can interact as they would in a face-to-face interview. The only difference is that they are in different locations (Cleland, Dixon and Kilvington, 2019).

Building rapport with participants is a component in successful interviewing. Rapport between the participant and interviewer creates a level of trust between the two and allows participants to be more open to disclose details relating to the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Research has investigated whether removing a shared space between an interviewer and interviewee impacts on the rapport between them, as there has been concern that remote interviews limit non-verbal cues; however, there is some indication that this impact can be mitigated, especially at a time of significant social change like the Covid-19 pandemic (Richardson, Godfrey and Walklate, 2021; Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards, 2021). I was concerned that participants may have been reluctant to conduct interviews online. However, this was not the case. For journalists, digital literacy and working is a relatively familiar practice due to the rapid growth of digital sports journalism and transformations in working practices in the twenty-first century (Domeneghetti, 2022). Further, for all participants the Covid-19 pandemic had forced people to become accustomed to using digital technology to communicate, socialise and work (Hantrais *et al.*, 2021). Hence, there was a familiarity and relative comfort with interacting with people digitally. Despite this, there were still some problems with participants using the

digital platform, such as forgetting to unmute the microphone when talking before the interview. However, these issues were quickly resolved, and the process helped to build rapport with participants as they found it amusing.

There are ethical considerations as well as potential security issues with online research. The digital security of digital platforms varies, as a result of this Northumbria University provided guidance on which platforms were allowed to be used for research purposes. Microsoft Teams was the sole platform the university deemed safe for research to be conducted on. Thus, if the participant could not use Microsoft Teams, the only alternative was to conduct the interview over the telephone, which I tried to minimise; however, three interviews (two journalists and one racing driver) were conducted via telephone. For added security for participants the interviews were not recorded via the online platform which would have involved video recording. Instead, the interviews were recorded with a standard digital voice recorder (Olympus DM-770) placed near the laptop speakers. This process generally worked well, except when there were issues with connectivity causing sound to drop or the laptop fans engaging creating noise. During the interviews when these issues occurred, participants were asked to repeat their answers to ensure they were captured, which resulted in minimal sound disruption. It was important to record the interviews to ensure an accurate account of the interview, all participants were made aware of and consented to this process.

The interview schedules for journalists and women racing drivers were designed to address the research questions and the themes identified in the media analysis of the representations of women racing drivers conducted for this thesis. The interview schedules were based upon the fundamental concepts described by Rubin and Rubin (2012), with main questions to answer the research question, follow-up questions to get details and richness, and probing questions to manage the conversation. Early versions of the schedule were adapted after being piloted with peers and my supervisors. Participants were further probed during the interview for steering, confirmation, clarification, and continuation (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

Drawing upon my experiences of being interviewed and conducting interviews I am acutely aware of the apprehension and nerves that the interviewee may be feeling. To help put the interviewee at ease, I only started the questions after introductions

and outlining the interview's format. I also created a light-hearted atmosphere by joking about the digital voice recorder possibly not recording. I have always found this puts participants at ease and helps start the conversation. Further, starting the interview with participants talking about themselves, what they love to do and why, allowed them to speak freely about their passion. This process also added to building rapport with the participants.

Following each interview, each participant (journalist or racing driver) was provided with a debrief sheet (which explained their right to withdraw from the study) and a copy of the interview transcribed verbatim from the recording. Validation by participants allowed for any further points to be added and for clarification of unclear points raised during the transcription process. None of the participants corrected or wanted to add to their transcripts. Interviews were arranged with a minimum of four days between each interview to allow for the transcription and validation by participants to be conducted and allow time for reflection. This post stage of an interview is important as it starts the process of immersion with the data and allows for researchers to reflect and refine their interviewing process between participants, and the reflection can help to inform the data analysis (Smith and Sparkes, 2016a).

### **3.7. Data analysis**

#### **3.7.1. Why use thematic analysis in the research?**

Thematic analysis (TA) is described as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I chose to use TA for several reasons. Firstly, TA is a flexible technique and that is not constrained to a singular theoretical framework, thus it could be used with the theoretical and conceptual framework which I articulated earlier in the chapter, whereas this would not have been the case for other qualitative analysis techniques, such as interpretive phenomenological analysis, grounded theory, or patterned-based discourse analysis (Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016). Additionally, TA can be used within different research designs, such as mixed methods, and data collection methods, making it suitable for the media analysis and interviews in this research (Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016). Furthermore, TA is widely used, and has been used in other recent media analyses of sportswomen in newspapers (e.g. Black and

Fielding-Lloyd, 2019; Bowes and Kitching, 2019). Therefore, TA was best suited for this research as I could utilise it for the qualitative media analysis and interviews with racing drivers and journalists. It is important to recognise that within TA there are several different approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2022). For this research I used reflexive TA, being reflective was an important part of the research process (as discussed above). Not only is reflexivity important in feminist stand point theory and in taking a Bourdieusian approach (Sweet, 2020), Braun and Clarke (2022) explain that engaging with reflexive practices allows for good quality analyses, especially when researchers work alone.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest using a six-stage process which I used to guide me through the data analysis: (1) familiarise yourself with your data; (2) generate initial codes; (3) search for themes; (4) review themes; (5) define and name themes, and finally (6) produce the report. Additionally, I kept a daily journal throughout the process of this thesis and this was particularly useful in the data analysis as it allowed me to summarise my thoughts and findings and how I came to those decisions, which in turn increases the trustworthiness of the research (Maher *et al.*, 2018).

### **3.7.2. Media Analysis**

The quantitative data were subjected to a content analysis which, as previously discussed, is "the most common form of quantitative textual analysis" (McKee, 2003, p. 127). Using the information collected from the protocol and data sheets each article was entered as a case in NVivo 12 and exported into SPSS Statistics 27. There were, in total, 4,638 articles about racing drivers, 4,159 articles about men (for the two years 2010 and 2020) and 479 about women (2010 to 2020). On commencing the quantitative analysis of the newspaper articles, it was found that the distribution of the data was not normally distributed<sup>21</sup>, thus it was subjected to non-parametric testing in SPSS (Field, 2018). Furthermore, during the analysis it was apparent that there were several outliers in this data; these outliers were checked and determined to be correct and thus left within the data. The combination

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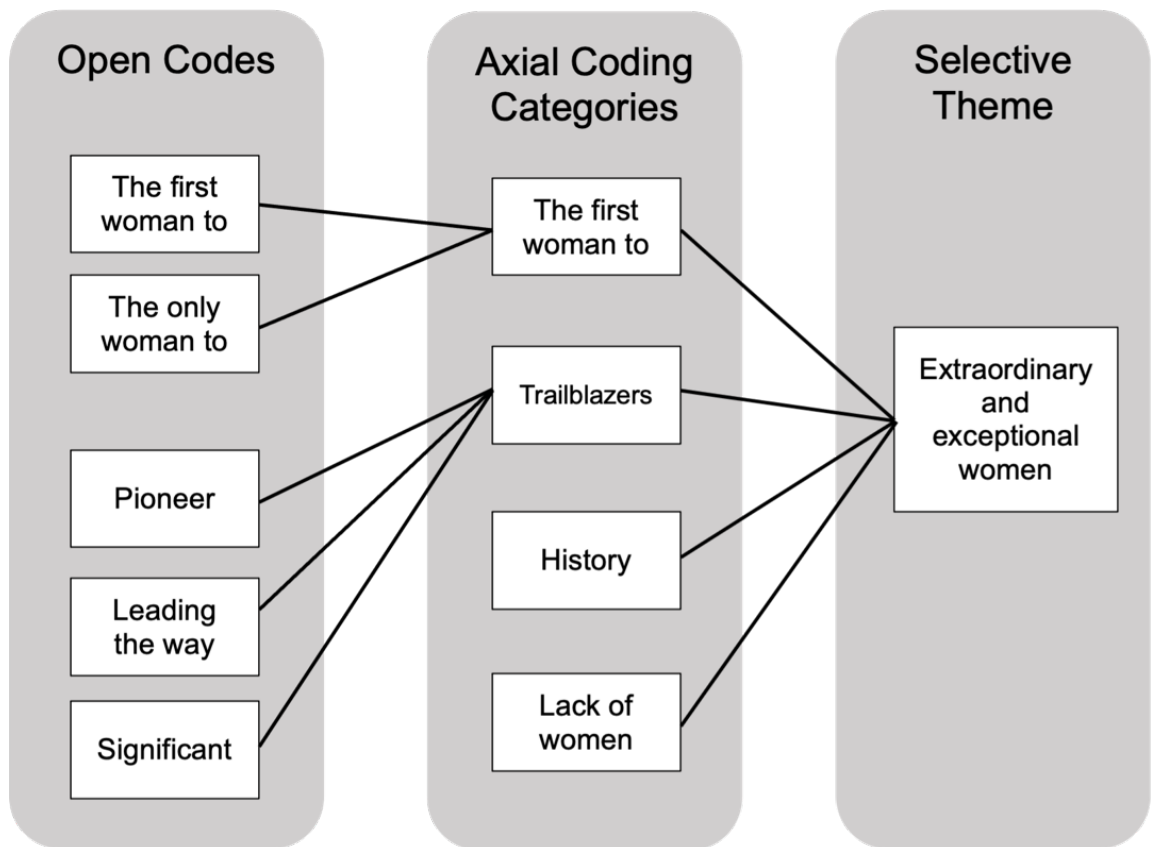
<sup>21</sup> Normally distributed data is a term used to describe data when it distributed in a symmetrical bell-shaped curve and parametric testing can occur when this and three other basic assumptions are met. The other three assumptions are homogeneity of variance, interval or ratio data and interdependence (Field, 2018).

of outliers and the data not being normally distributed limited the statistical testing that could be conducted (Field, 2018).

For the qualitative data analysis, all 479 articles about women were analysed thematically, whereas a random sample of 20% from each newspaper and year were analysed for the articles about men. The decision not to thematically analyse all the articles about men was due to the volume of articles and because the purpose of this additional sample was to provide a comparison to the articles about women, i.e. to ascertain whether articles about men had the same themes present as those found in the articles about women.

After immersing myself in the data, the articles were coded using NVivo 12. The coding process involved a combination of open and axial coding. Coding is an essential stage of the data analysis process as it allows the researcher to reflect, interact, and focus on the data, identifying ideas present in the data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The data was first coded openly (stage two of the thematic process) using a deductive approach using the concepts used in previous research about the representation of sportswomen in sports media, which have been summarised by Fink (2015) and Bruce (2016). A codebook was created, informed by Crabtree and Miller (1999) to achieve a consistent approach throughout the coding process. Following this, the data was inductively coded to establish codes not previously identified within the deductive approach, for example the codes of 'royalty', 'trailblazers', and 'death and injury' emerged during this stage. Following the two stages of opening coding, the data were further analysed using axial coding (stage three of the thematic process). Axial coding allowed for the grouping and refinement of the open codes into categories prepared for the final stages of coding (Williams and Moser, 2019). Finally, selective coding provided the overall themes (stages four and five of the thematic process) (Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016). An example of the coding process is shown in Figure 3, for the selective theme 'extraordinary and exceptional women', focusing on the axial code 'trailblazer' and 'first woman'.

**Figure 3.** The coding process for the theme 'extraordinary and exceptional women' using the axial code of 'trailblazers' and 'first woman to' to highlight the open code process.



Adapted from *Figure 6* in Williams and Moser (2019, p. 53).

Once the themes had been established, I could commence the writing-up process. An important part of writing up was to ensure that contradictory cases and alternative explanations were noted and highlighted. As not only does this process increase the trustworthiness of the data (Gratton and Jones, 2014), but as a reflective researcher it is important to identify possible interpretations of the research that are outside of my viewpoint.

### **3.7.3. Interviews**

The transcriptions of the interviews were initially thematically analysed as two separate groups (women racing drivers and journalists). The process of transcribing the interviews allowed for deep immersion into the data. To help maintain the deep immersion in the data, each interview was openly coded after the transcription before any more interviews were conducted. Once all the interviews were



conducted, the interviews were reviewed to ensure the coding process remained consistent between the interviews within each group. This process also refreshed the interviews in my mind. In the same vein as the process for the media analysis, the next stage was to search for the themes, review them and then name them.

One of the key points of mixed-methods research is how the different elements of the research design are pulled together and incorporated (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The different interactions between the different elements of this research are shown in Figure 3. While analysing the data, I would compare and contrast the themes and findings from the different methods to identify similarities and differences. This process helped to maintain a systematic approach which in turn provided consistent analysis of the data.

### **3.8. *Trustworthiness, credibility, and quality***

Throughout this research project, strategies were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the quantitative data and the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative data, a vital part of any quality research (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this chapter I have discussed many of the strategies I have used: including, for example, how the quantitative research was designed to increase internal and external validity, the reproducibility of the study, triangulation, reflexivity, validation by participants, including negative and contradictory cases and explanations, and discussing the positionality of the researcher.

Critical friends “is a process of critical dialogue between people, with researchers giving voice to their interpretations in relation to other people who listen and offer critical feedback” (Smith and McGannon, 2018, p. 113). This is an invaluable process for lone researchers, as it provides an external soundboard for theoretical ideas, interpretations, explanations from the data and writing process, and also supports reflexivity practices (Creswell, 2007; Smith and McGannon, 2018). Throughout the design, data collection, analysis and writing-up stages I used two fellow PhD students as critical friends. One was a sports media and policy specialist and the other was a sociologist with very little knowledge of sport. Having conversations with both of these people enabled me to talk through my decision-making thoughts and they were able to ask critical questions and play devil’s

advocate. Likewise, my discussions with my supervisory team were invaluable as they prompted critical reflections, feedback, discussions, and insights into the design of my research, data interpretation and analysis at all stages.

The final strategy I employed in this research was rich and thick description. Throughout my writing-up of the results of this study I have included long quotations and extracts of the data<sup>22</sup>. This practice allows readers to make their own decisions regarding the transferability of the data to other situations as they can consider if there are shared characteristics to those described (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, using rich and thick descriptions through the quotations allowed the participants' voices to be heard in their own words rather than through the researcher's.

### **3.9. Ethical considerations**

For all research (regardless of its methodology, or the methods employed) consideration of ethical issues is required to ensure that the research is ethically sound before commencing (Flick, 2018; Jones, 2022). While designing my research, I consulted with the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association (see British Sociological Association, 2019) and Northumbria University (see Northumbria University, 2019), to ensure that the participants of the research were protected. In addition, before conducting any data collection, I obtained ethical approval from the Department of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Northumbria University, and as the research developed to include journalists, an ethics amendment was submitted and approved.

Some of the key ethical issues in research are voluntary participation and informed consent. Jones (2022, p. 138) explains that for voluntary participation a “potential participant, they should be informed as to the nature of the study, why they have been selected and the use of the data that they will provide”. Potential participants were given a participation information sheet which explained the purpose of the research, that their participation was voluntary and also that they had the right to withdraw at any time, how their confidentiality would be maintained, and how the

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout the thesis when extracts are provided from the media analysis, the newspaper will be given as the author so that the source is easily identifiable for the reader. See the appendix for a reference list of all the articles about women racing drivers used within the data analysis.

findings would be used for various research outputs (such as conferences, journal articles, and a possible monograph in addition to the thesis). It was important that the participants fully understood the purpose of the research and what was expected of them, and I encouraged participants to ask questions, which some did. The interviewees were also made aware that the interviews would be recorded. Only when participants were fully informed and agreed to participate and had signed an informed consent form interviews occurred.

### **3.9.1. *Maintaining confidentiality***

One of the key considerations during this research was ensuring the anonymity of the participants, be they journalists or racing drivers. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout the research process so that no personal data, geographical or organisational identifiers were evident in the data presented and omitted from the write-up. I also used basic pseudonyms for each participant using their role (racing driver or journalist) and a randomly assigned alphabetical letter.

Furthermore, in addition to using pseudonyms I purposefully limited the demographic data shared to ensure the anonymity of the participants. As previously discussed, a relatively small population of women racing drivers in the UK exists. Many of these racing drivers have public profiles to seek sponsorship at all levels of the sport, from grassroots up to international level. Moreover, the highly commercial nature of motorsport and its relationship with the media meant it was important to protect the identity of the drivers, as identifying an individual by age, ethnicity, level of racing, or racing series could risk identifying them. Consequently, racing drivers are referred to in relation to their years of racing experience, making it difficult to assume the racing drivers' identities, as identifiable markers have been removed. Likewise, as only a small number of journalists report on motorsport, the decision was made to reference only the number of years these people had been working as a journalist, as well as their gender, age-range, and a summarised job role to protect their identity.

Finally, all the data collected electronically (such as interview recordings, transcripts, and consent forms) was stored within Northumbria University's U-drive,

password-protected and regularly backed up. Additionally, all files were password protected and computers were always password locked when left unaccompanied. Hard copies of interview transcripts were kept in a locked drawer that only I could access. I also followed the university's guidelines for the use of audio equipment to ensure confidentiality and security. All the collected data has been stored per the University's guidelines and Data Protection Act (2018). All these measures were taken to ensure that the research was ethical and maintained the confidentiality of the participants. After the research is concluded, all data will be destroyed in accordance with the University's guidelines.

### **3.10. Summary**

This chapter has discussed the feminist and Bourdieusian theoretical underpinning of this research, my positionality, and the rationale for taking a mixed-methods approach. It has explained the choice of methods used (media analysis and interviews), how the samples were created, and how the data were gathered and analysed. Finally, ethical considerations and the challenges have been discussed alongside measures taken to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

The following four chapters detail the analysis findings and discuss their significance. Chapter 4, which follows, gives an empirical overview of the participation of women racing drivers in motorsport between 2010 and 2020. Moreover, Chapter 4 primarily focuses on the quantitative data from the media analysis as it was important to provide a clear statistical understanding of the representation of women racing drivers as this has not previously been done. Notably, the quantitative findings are not just constrained to Chapter 4, they are drawn upon and combined with the qualitative media analysis and interview findings in Chapters 5 to 7. In Chapter 5, the way in which women racing drivers are represented as *others* in motorsport is explored. Following this, Chapter 6 examines how this *othered* status of women racing drivers is nuanced, with the narrative of 'extraordinary and exceptional women' used to sell the story and increase visibility of women racing drivers in British newspapers. Finally Chapter 7, discusses the changes that have been identified in the reporting of women racing drivers, both

quantitatively and qualitatively, and the possible future directions that coverage of women racing drivers may take.

## **Chapter 4. Lights out and away they go: Exploration into where women racing drivers race and quantifying their coverage in British newspapers.**

### ***4.1. Introduction***

To an ordinary fan or a motorsport enthusiast, racing is all about the driver, the car, the engine and the crew. However, there's one more critical component that is overlooked by a majority of its fans: data.

(Amarnath, 2022)

Consensus exists among academic scholars that sportswomen in the printed media are subject to considerably lower levels of coverage than sportsmen (for example French, 2013; Green, Holtzapple and McKinley, 2016; Schmidt, 2016; Kaiser, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Frideres and Palao, 2019; Hovden and Von Der Lippe, 2019). Little is known about the coverage of women racing drivers, however recent research has found that the proportion of coverage sportswomen in British newspapers have received ranges from 3.0% (Schmidt, 2018) to 6.2% (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Before this current study, there had been no quantitative investigation solely into the coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers, despite motorsport being regularly covered in printed media (Nieland and Horky, 2013). Thus, by examining newspaper reporting of women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020, this research provides the first quantitative insight into the coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers.

This chapter outlines the quantitative data collected within the media analysis from the six selected British national newspapers and their Sunday counterparts. The qualitative data from the media analysis will be discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This chapter is comprised of three distinct findings sections. The first provides a backdrop to the research, consisting of preliminary research examining the top international and British motorsport series for the participation of women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020. The second section focuses solely on the data collected on women racing drivers between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, and examines the articles' distribution, content, and authorship. The third and final findings section concerns the coverage of men racing drivers in the two years 2010 and 2020, providing statistical insights into how gender functioned for racing

drivers in the selected newspapers. Finally, the findings from the three sections are discussed. Therefore, this chapter will provide a quantitative background of how women racing drivers have been represented in the selected British newspapers between 2010 and 2020 before the qualitative analysis in the following chapters.

## **4.2. *And now we meet the drivers...***

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are considerably fewer women than men racing in motorsport. Preliminary research was undertaken before analysing the newspaper articles to understand how many women were racing in the top echelons of the sport and which racing series they were competing in between 2010 and 2020. This section focuses on the participation of women in FIA world championships, major FIA series, IndyCar and NASCAR series, and British and European series between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020<sup>23</sup>. These series represent only a fraction of the motorsport competitions and events that take place across the world, the selected are the main series available for British television viewers<sup>24</sup>.

### **4.2.1. *FIA World Championships***

#### **4.2.1.1. *FIA Formula One World Championship (F1)***

Between 2010 and 2020 there were six women, of whom two are British, who were signed to F1 teams (see Table 4), however none of them had been signed as main drivers for their respective teams. Instead, they have been either test or development drivers, or in the case of Simona De Silvestro, an affiliated driver<sup>25</sup>. Of these women, only Wolff participated in any F1 Grand Prix weekends, driving in four free practice sessions between 2014 and 2015 (Johnston, 2015).

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<sup>23</sup> The racing series names are correct as of 2021. Over the years motorsport series have changed name for several reasons, such as change of promoter or sponsorship. During the period of the data sample several series changed name. To be clearer for the reader and those unfamiliar to motorsport the series will be referred to only by the series name as correct in 2021.

<sup>24</sup> The motorsport series selected were available on Sky, BT, BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, Eurosport and FreeSports in 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Affiliated drivers are associated with a racing team, they are usually racing drivers who have been talent spotted by a particular team and could be assigned to their junior/young racer programmes. However, they are not signed to the main racing team, whereas test and development drivers are.

**Table 4.** Women racing drivers in F1 teams, 2010-2020.

| <b>Name (Nationality)</b>           | <b>Year(s)</b> | <b>Team and Position</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--|
| <b>Maria de Villota</b><br>(ESP)    | 2012           | Marussia F1 Team, Test Driver  |
| <b>Susie Wolff</b><br>(GBR)         | 2012-15        | Williams Formula One Team, Development driver<br>2012-2014, Test driver 2015 |
| <b>Simona De Silvestro</b><br>(SUI) | 2014           | Sauber F1 Team, Affiliated driver  |
| <b>Carmen Jordá</b><br>(ESP)        | 2015-16        | Lotus Formula One Team (2015), Renault F1<br>Team (2016), Development driver |
| <b>Tatiana Calderón</b><br>(COL)    | 2017-          | Alfa Romeo Racing ORLEN, 2017-2019<br>Development driver, 2020 Test driver   |
| <b>Jamie Chadwick</b><br>(GBR)      | 2019-          | Williams Formula One Team, Development driver                                |

Sources: (Elizalde, 2012; Anderson, 2014; Benson, 2016; Esler, 2016; JCR, 2021; TCN Action SL, 2021).

#### **4.2.1.2. FIA World Rallycross Championship (World RX)**

Two women have competed in World RX. The first being Ramona Karlsson (SWE) who raced in the inaugural season (2014) finishing 38<sup>th</sup> overall out of 58 drivers. Having competed in five of the twelve rounds, she also raced in one race in 2015 and was unclassified for the season as she did not score any points (Motorsport Stats, 2021j). After a four-year period without a woman racing in World RX, Mandie August (GER) made her debut in 2020, finishing the season 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 26 drivers having competed in two races that season (Motorsport Stats, 2021j). To date, a woman has not competed in a full season of World RX.

#### **4.2.1.3. FIA World Rally Championship (WRC)**

Although 15 women have raced in the WRC (see Table 5), none have competed in the top class. However, British rally driver Louise Cook won her class in 2012, the first woman to win a WRC title outside of the FIA Ladies Cup (motorsport.com, 2012).



**Table 5.** Women racing drivers in WRC, 2010-2020.

| <b>Name (Nationality)</b>               | <b>Year(s)</b>   | <b>Number of Rally starts</b> | <b>Overall Standing Class and Year (where applicable)</b> |
|---|------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Ekaterina Stratieva</b><br>(BUL)     | 2010             | 1                             | -   |
| <b>Ramona Karlsson</b><br>(SWE)         | 2012             | 4                             | PWRC- 13/15 (2012)  |
| <b>Emma Gilmour</b><br>(NZL)            | 2010, 2012       | 2                             | -   |
| <b>Sara Williams</b><br>(GBR)           | 2014             | 1                             | -   |
| <b>Tina Wiegand</b><br>(GER)            | 2013-14          | 2                             | -   |
| <b>Charlotte Dalmasso</b><br>(FRA)      | 2013, 2015       | 4                             | WRC3- 24/25 (2015)  |
| <b>Eve Wallenwein</b><br>(GER)          | 2013-14,<br>2016 | 3                             | -   |
| <b>Molly Taylor</b><br>(AUS)            | 2011-16          | 15                            | WRC3- 6/18 (2014)   |
| <b>Edith Weiss</b><br>(SUI)             | 2010-11,<br>2017 | 3                             | -   |
| <b>Burcu Çetinkaya</b><br>(TUR)         | 2010, 2018       | 3                             | -   |
| <b>Nabila Tejpar</b><br>(GBR)           | 2017-19          | 7                             | -   |
| <b>Tamara Molinaro</b><br>(ITA)         | 2017-19          | 3                             | WRC2- 49/73 (2019)  |
| <b>Louise Cook</b><br>(GBR)             | 2012,<br>2016-19 | 12                            | PWRC- 8/15 (2012) WRC3-<br>18/21(2017), 6/24 (2018)       |
| <b>Keanna Erickson-<br/>Chang</b> (USA) | 2019             | 1                             | JWRC- 15/17 (2019)  |
| <b>Catie Munnings</b><br>(GBR)          | 2020             | 1                             | -   |

Sources: Drivers, years active and number of entries from Motorsport Stats (2021i), and season standings from FIA (2021d).

#### **4.2.1.4. FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC)**

Just eleven women have competed in the 24 hours of Le Mans during the sample period, and there were four all-women teams (see Table 6). Only one woman, Keiko Ihara, competed in WEC: she finished 22/40 overall in 2013 (she finished 10<sup>th</sup> twice, as mid-season she changed car), in 2014 she competed in three races and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> twice, and raced in just one WEC race in 2018 (MotorSport, 2021). There were no British women racing between 2010 and 2020.

**Table 6.** Women racing drivers in WEC and 24 Hours of Le Mans, 2010-2020.

| <b>Name (Nationality)</b>         | <b>Year(s) of entry</b> | <b>Class<sup>26</sup></b> | <b>Overall Class Standing(s)</b>   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Vanina Ickx</b><br>(BEL)       | 2010-11                 | LMP1                      | 24 Hours of Le Mans: DNF, 7 <sup>th</sup>                                    |
| <b>Cyndie Allermann</b><br>(SUI)  | 2010°                   | LMGT1                     | 24 Hours of Le Mans: DNF   |
| <b>Natacha Gachnang</b><br>(SUI)  | 2010°, 2013             | LMGT1,<br>LMP2            | 24 Hours of Le Mans: DNF, 6 <sup>th</sup>                                    |
| <b>Rahel Frey</b><br>(SUI)        | 2010°,<br>2019°-20°,    | LMGT1,<br>LMGTE AM        | 24 Hours of Le Mans: DNF, 9 <sup>th</sup> ,<br>9 <sup>th</sup>               |
| <b>Andrea Robertson</b><br>(USA)  | 2011                    | LMGTE AM*                 | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 3 <sup>rd</sup>   |
| <b>Keiko Ihara</b><br>(JPN)       | 2012-14*,<br>2018*      | LMP2                      | WEC: Not classified, 10 <sup>th</sup> , Not<br>classified, 19 <sup>th</sup>  |
| <b>Inès Taittinger</b><br>(FRA)   | 2016                    | LMP2                      | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 18 <sup>th</sup>  |
| <b>Christina Neilson</b><br>(DEN) | 2016-18                 | LMGTE AM                  | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 6 <sup>th</sup> , 14 <sup>th</sup> ,<br>6 <sup>th</sup> |
| <b>Manuela Gostner</b><br>(ITA)   | 2019°-20°,              | LMGTE AM                  | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 9 <sup>th</sup> , 9 <sup>th</sup>                       |
| <b>Michelle Gatting</b><br>(DEN)  | 2019°-20°               | LMGTE AM                  | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 9 <sup>th</sup> , 9 <sup>th</sup>                       |
| <b>Beitske Visser</b><br>(NED)    | 2020°                   | LMP2                      | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 9 <sup>th</sup>   |
| <b>Sophia Flörsch</b><br>(GER)    | 2020°                   | LMP2                      | 24 Hours of Le Mans: 9 <sup>th</sup>   |
| <b>Tatiana Calderón</b><br>(COL)  | 2020°                   | LMP2                      | 9 <sup>th</sup>  |

Sources: 24 Hours of Le Mans- MotorSport online database (MotorSport, 2021) and WEC-WEC driver profiles (WEC, 2021).

°All women racing driver team

\*Finished on the podium.

#### **4.2.1.5. ABB FIA Formula E World Championship (FE)**

FE's first two seasons had women racing. During the 2014/15 season, three women competed in the championship out of 35 drivers, however, none completed the full season. They were: Simona De Silvestro (SUI), who finished 28<sup>th</sup> overall; Michela Cerruti (ITA), 29<sup>th</sup> overall; Katherine Legge (GBR), 33<sup>rd</sup> overall (Motorsport Stats, 2021e). The second season, 2015/16, saw only De Silvestro return, she raced the full season, finishing 18<sup>th</sup> overall out of 23 drivers (Motorsport Stats, 2021e). No women competed in following five seasons of FE.

<sup>26</sup> Class of car in WEC is determined by the FIA, LMP1 and LMGT1/PRO are for manufacturer teams, LMP2, LMGT2/3 and LMGTE AM are for independent teams are subjected to the FIA's grading system which is designed to level the field and not allow teams to comprise of all gold rated drivers (see FIA, 2021a).

## 4.2.2. International

### 4.2.2.1. FIA Formula 2 (F2)

The only woman to race in F2 was Tatiana Calderón (COL) in 2019; she finished 22<sup>nd</sup> in the drivers' standings for the season out of 27 drivers, and her best race result was 11<sup>th</sup> out of 20 (MotorSport, 2021).

### 4.2.2.2. FIA Formula 3 (F3)

Between 2010 and 2020, eight women (one British) raced in the series, with no woman competing in the series in 2010, 2011 or 2019 (see Table 7).

**Table 7.** Women racing drivers in the FIA F3 championship, 2010-2020.

| <b>Name (Nationality)</b>        | <b>Year(s) of entry</b>                    | <b>Standings</b>                              | <b>Best race result</b> |
|----------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| <b>Alice Powell</b><br>(GBR)     | 2012, 2013                                 | 19, 30*                                       | 8                       |
| <b>Vicky Piria</b><br>(ITA)      | 2012                                       | 26*   | 12                      |
| <b>Carmen Jordá</b><br>(ESP)     | 2012, 2013, 2014                           | 28*, 30, 29*                                  | 13                      |
| <b>Samin Gomez</b><br>(VEN)      | 2013, 2015                                 | 26, 30*                                       | 13                      |
| <b>Beitske Visser</b><br>(NED)   | 2014, 2015                                 | 27*, 28*                                      | 15                      |
| <b>Michela Cerruti</b><br>(ITA)  | 2013 <sup>o</sup>                          | Not classified*                               | 18                      |
| <b>Tatiana Calderón</b><br>(COL) | 2013-15 <sup>o</sup> , 2016,<br>2017, 2018 | Not classified, 15,<br>classified, 21, 18, 16 | Not 5                   |
| <b>Sophia Flörsch</b><br>(GER)   | 2018 <sup>o</sup> , 2020                   | 22, 29  | 10 <sup>t</sup>         |

Sources: GP3: (Motorsport Stats, 2021f), FIA European F3 (Motorsport Stats, 2021d), FIA Formula 3 (F3, 2021).

<sup>o</sup>Raced in Europeans F3

\*Did not compete in full season.

## 4.2.3. European

### 4.2.3.1. Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters (DTM)

Three women raced full seasons of the DTM during the data sample period. These women were: Katherine Legge (GBR) who raced in 2010 finishing 18<sup>th</sup> overall with a best result of 14<sup>th</sup>; Susie Wolff (GBR) who raced in 2010, 2011, 2012 and finished 13<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> respectively, with her top result coming in 2010 when she finished 7<sup>th</sup>; and finally, Rachel Frey (SUI) who raced in 2011 and 2012 and finished 19<sup>th</sup> in

both seasons, with her best result 7<sup>th</sup> in 2012 (MotorSport, 2021). The DTM had no women racing drivers for the 2013-2020 seasons.

#### 4.2.3.2. *International GT Open Championship*

Between 2010 and 2020, there were five women competing in the International GT Open Championship; none contested the full season (see Table 8). Beitske Visser was the only one to podium, with a second-place finish in 2019.

**Table 8.** Women racing drivers in the International GT Open Championship, 2010-2020.

| <i>Name (Nationality)</i>                | <i>Year(s) of entry</i> | <i>Class<sup>1</sup></i> | <i>Overall Standing</i> | <i>Best Race Result</i> |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Suzanne Weist</b><br>(GER)            | 2014 <sup>o*</sup>      | GTS                      | -                       | 9 <sup>th</sup>         |
| <b>Michelle Gattling</b><br>(DEN)        | 2014 <sup>o*</sup>      | GTS                      | -                       | 9 <sup>th</sup>         |
| <b>Małgorzata "Gosia" Rdest</b><br>(POL) | 2018*                   | AM                       | 45/63                   | 25 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Beitske Visser</b><br>(NED)           | 2019*                   | PRO                      | 11/49                   | 2 <sup>nd</sup>         |
| <b>Janine Hill</b><br>(GBR)              | 2019*                   | AM                       | 43/49                   | 17 <sup>th</sup>        |

Source: GT Open (2021) driver data base

<sup>o</sup>Competed in an all-female team

\*Did not compete in full season

<sup>1</sup> Class is PRO for manufacturer teams and AM and GTS for independents and are subject to restrictions on drivers which is determined according to the FIA driver classification (see FIA, 2021a).

#### 4.2.4. *British*

##### 4.2.4.1. *Kwik Fit British Touring Cars Championship (BTCC)*

During the sample period only two women raced in the BTCC series, both in the revised 2020 season. Jade Edwards (GBR) became the first woman in 13 years to race in the BTCC, taking part in the three races at Silverstone Round (BTCC, 2021) and Jessica Hawkins (GBR) raced in the three races at the Snetterton Round (Motorsport Stats, 2021c).

#### 4.2.4.2. BRDC British F3 Championship

There has only been one woman to compete in the championship and this was British driver Jamie Chadwick. She competed in the series in 2017 and 2018, where she finished 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> overall respectively and won Round 17 at Brands Hatch in 2018 (Motorsport Stats, 2021a).

#### 4.2.4.3. British F4 Championship

Women have raced in every year of the championship except for 2018 and have achieved more than one podium finish (see Table 9).

**Table 9.** Women racing drivers in the British F4 Championship, 2010-2020.

| <b>Name (Nationality)</b>           | <b>Year(s) of entry</b> | <b>Overall Standing</b> | <b>Best Race Result</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Louise Richardson</b><br>(GBR)   | 2015                    | 16/24                   | 3 <sup>rd</sup>         |
| <b>Jessica Hawkins</b><br>(GBR)     | 2015                    | 23/24                   | 11 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Carrie Schreiner</b><br>(GER)    | 2016                    | 17/20                   | 4 <sup>th</sup>         |
| <b>Alexandra Mohnhaupt</b><br>(MEX) | 2016-17                 | Not classified, 23/24   | 11 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Alexandra Marinescu</b><br>(ROU) | 2016                    | Not classified          | 12 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Abbie Munro</b><br>(GBR)         | 2019                    | 16/16                   | 9 <sup>th</sup>         |
| <b>Reema Juffali</b><br>(KSA)       | 2019-20                 | 13/16, 13/15            | 8 <sup>th</sup>         |
| <b>Abbi Pulling</b><br>(GBR)        | 2020                    | 6/15*                   | 2 <sup>nd</sup>         |

Source: Motorsport Stats online database (Motorsport Stats, 2021b).

\*Four podiums achieved in the season

#### 4.2.5. USA

##### 4.2.5.1. NASCAR Cup Series

During the sample period, there was only one woman to race in the series—Danica Patrick. She raced in the series between 2012 and 2018 with her best overall standing was 24<sup>th</sup> in 2015 and 2016, and her best race result was 6<sup>th</sup> place in 2014 (Motorsport Stats, 2021h).

#### 4.2.5.2. NTT IndyCar Series

In total, there were seven women racing during the sample period and there were women racing in every year except 2020 (see Table 10). Patrick was the most successful woman in terms of overall standing in the series finishing 10<sup>th</sup> (in 2010 and 2011) and the British driver Pippa Mann raced in the most seasons (eight); however, in four of these years she only competed in the Indianapolis500 race (Indy500).

**Table 10.** Women racing drivers in the NTT IndyCar Series, 2010-2020.

| <b>Name (Nationality)</b>           | <b>Year(s) of entry</b> | <b>Overall Standing</b>       | <b>Best Race Result</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Ana Beatriz</b><br>(BRA)         | 2010-13                 | 30, 21, 29, 29                | 11 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Danica Patrick</b><br>(USA)      | 2010-11, 2018           | 10, 10, 38                    | 2 <sup>nd</sup>         |
| <b>Milka Duno</b><br>(VEN)          | 2010                    | 23                            | 19 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Simona de Silvestro</b><br>(SUI) | 2010-13, 2015           | 19, 20, 24, 13, 30            | 2 <sup>nd</sup>         |
| <b>Sarah Fisher</b><br>(USA)        | 2010                    | 26                            | 15 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Pippa Mann*</b><br>(GBR)         | 2011, 2013-19*          | 38, 31, 33, 29,<br>29, 30, 31 | 13 <sup>th</sup>        |
| <b>Katherine Legge</b><br>(GBR)     | 2012-13                 | 26, 37                        | 9 <sup>th</sup>         |

Source: Motorsport Stats online database (Motorsport Stats, 2021g).

\*Competed in Indy500 did not qualify in 2018.

#### 4.2.6. Women-only

##### 4.2.6.1. WSeries

The inaugural season<sup>27</sup>, which supported the DTM, consisted of twenty women—five were British—and the overall champion was British driver Jamie Chadwick (WSeries, 2021a). The series was cancelled for the 2020 season due to the Covid-

<sup>27</sup> The overall drivers' standings for the 2019 season were as follows: 1. Jamie Chadwick (GBR), 2. Beitske Visser (NED), 3. Alice Powell (GBR), 4. Marta Garcia (ESP), 5. Emma Kimiläinen (FIN), 6. Fabienne Wohlwend (LIE), 7. Miki Koyama (JPN), 8. Sarah Moore (GBR), 9. Vicky Piria (ITA), 10. Tasmin Pepper (ZAF), 11. Sabré Cook (USA), 12. Jessica Hawkins (GBR), 13. Caitlin Wood (AUS), 14. Gosia Rdset (POL), 15. Esmee Hawkey (GBR), 16. Naomi Schiff (RWA), 17. Vivien Keszthelyi (HUN), 18. Shea Holbrook (USA), 19. Megan Gilkes (CAN) and 20. Sarah Bovy (GER) (WSeries, 2021a).

19 pandemic and it was announced that the series would become a support series for F1 in 2021 (Klein, 2020).

In sum, women racing drivers have raced in all of the examined series except for F1, where Wolff participated in practice sessions only. Even although women have raced in the series, very few of them have competed for full seasons, instead they have participated in ad-hoc races. Further investigation is needed to understand the cause of this, which is beyond the scope of this research. There does appear to be two distinctive periods of women participating in racing series with the most women racing between 2010-2015 and 2018-2020. Future research could investigate why this is the case.

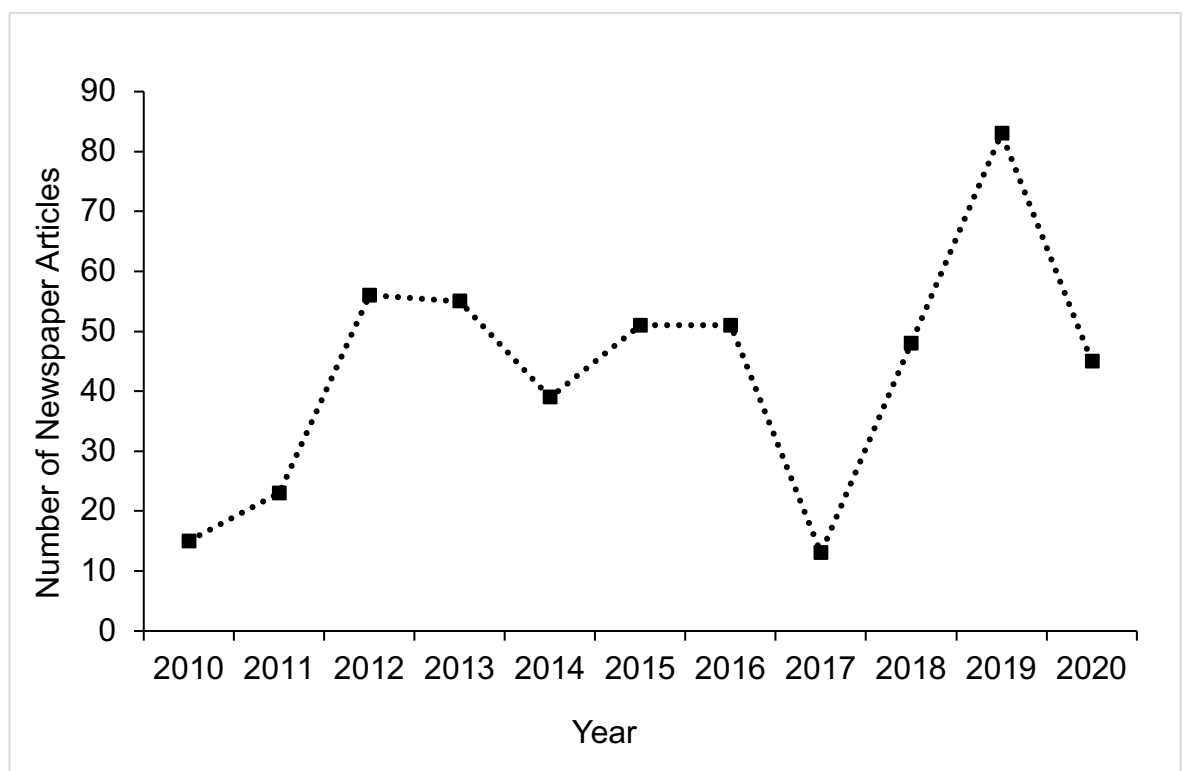
### ***4.3. Lining up on the grid: The representation of women racing drivers in British newspaper articles, 2010 to 2020.***

#### ***4.3.1. Distribution of articles***

During the research period (January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020) in total 14,028 articles were generated by the data search. After removing duplicates and non-relevant articles (see Chapter 3 for details), 479 articles were found to be about women racing drivers across the six British national newspapers and their Sunday counterparts. The average number of newspaper articles for the whole data collection period was 43.6 per year. However, the articles were not evenly distributed over the 11 years, see Figure 4. In terms of absolute numbers, there was a significant increase (200%) in the number of articles from the start of the data collection—2010 (n=15)— to the end of the sample period—2020 (n=45). It is worth noting that in 2020 there was a 45.8% reduction in the number of articles from the previous year, which could be a result of the impact of Covid-19 on women's participation in motorsport. There were two distinct periods of increased coverage for women racing drivers, the first being between 2012 and 2016 and the second between 2018 and 2019. The peaks could be in relation to more women racing drivers being involved in the top racing series and the launch of the WSeries in 2018, or it could be a result of what McLachlan (2019) describes as a 'boom time' in the media's interest in sportswomen. The lowest amount of coverage during the data period came in 2017 (n=13), which accounted for only 2.7% of the total articles and

was a 74.5% decrease in coverage from the previous year. In a reversal of the peak periods, there were very few women racing at the top levels of the sport regularly in 2017. The peak coverage was in 2019, with 83 articles, equating to 17.3% of all the articles collected, a 72.9% increase in the number of articles from 2018, and a 453% increase in the number of articles from 2010. The factors that may have influenced the identified trends above in the distribution of articles about women racing drivers will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

**Figure 4.** The overall distribution of newspaper articles about women racing drivers 2010-2020.



Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic

After further examination of the data, it became evident that there were differences in the number of articles between each newspaper. To understand if the number of articles on women racing drivers was influenced by the newspaper type, a chi-squared goodness-of-fit test was conducted to determine whether the articles were equally distributed across the three newspaper types, 'quality', 'mid-market' and 'tabloid'. The minimum expected frequency was 159.7. The chi-squared goodness-of-fit test indicated that the distribution of articles in 'quality', 'mid-market' and 'tabloid' newspapers was statistically significantly different ( $\chi^2(2) = 58.551, p <$



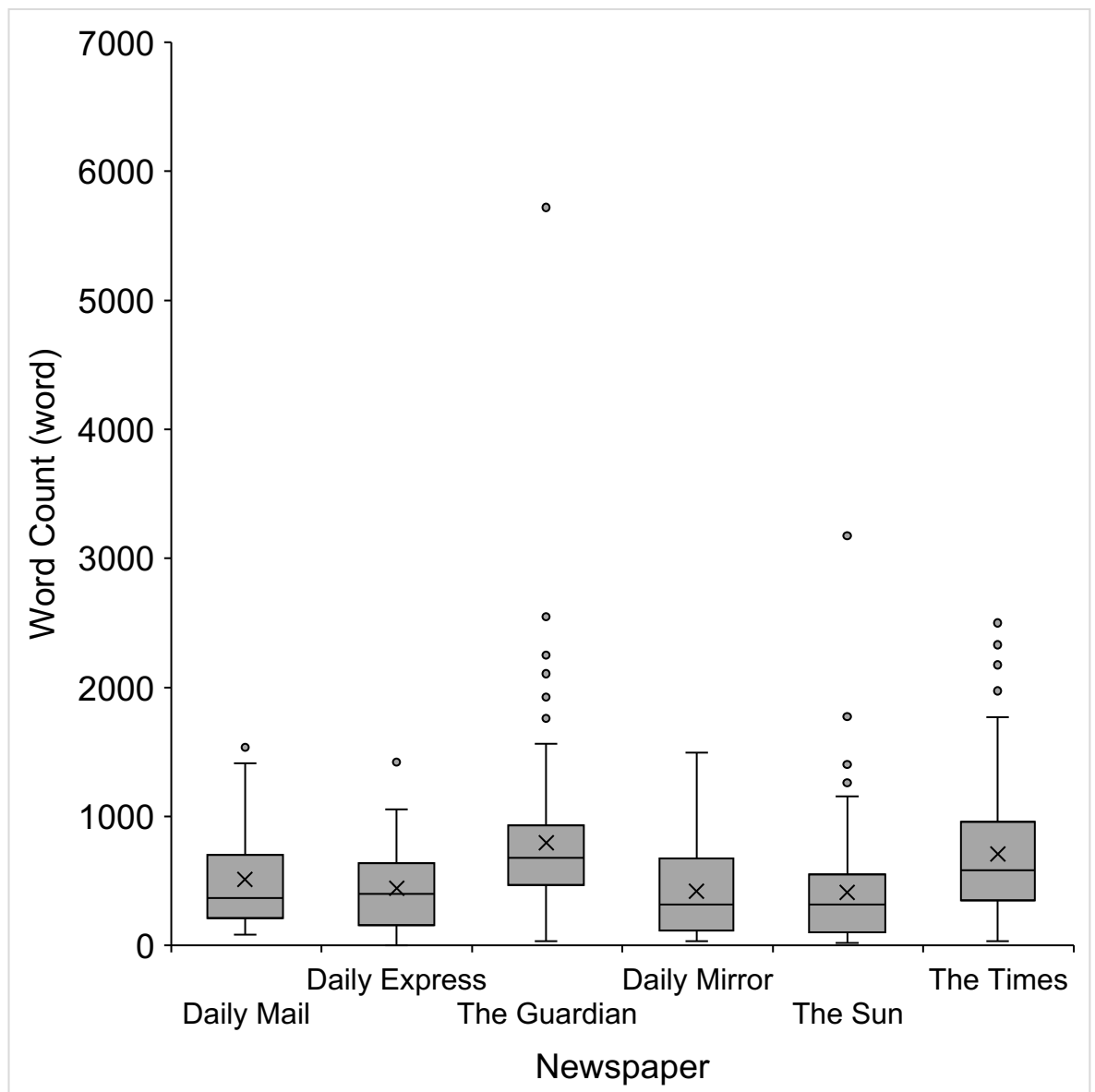
0.001), with almost half of the articles (49.7%) coming from 'quality' newspapers. In terms of individual newspapers, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* had the most articles about women racing drivers (n=132), followed by *The Guardian* and *The Observer* (n=106). *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* was third overall (n=81), with the *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday* in fourth (n=70). In fifth place, with over 30% less coverage than fourth, was the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* (n=48). It is worth noting that the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* was the only newspaper pair to have one year with no articles about women racing drivers; this was in 2017. Finally, the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* had the fewest articles about women racing drivers over the data collection period with just 42 articles.

Moreover, examining each year individually for the distribution of articles across the newspapers, some patterns emerged that reflected the findings above. Generally, the 'quality' newspapers provided the greatest proportion of the articles for each year up until 2019 (*The Guardian* and *The Observer* for four of these years and *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* for five years). The exception was 2017, the lowest year of coverage, when *The Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* had the greatest proportion of articles. However, the dominance of the 'quality' newspapers appeared to start to falter at the end of the sample period as *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* had the joint highest amount of coverage in 2019, and the highest amount of coverage for the last year of the sample, 2020. This was in stark contrast to *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday's* coverage of women racing drivers in the early years of the data collection period, as they provided the lowest proportion of coverage in 2010, 2011 and 2014.

The next stage of analysis was to investigate the word count of the articles and establish if there had been changes during the 11 years sampled and if the average word count varied by newspaper. The overall mean word count ( $\pm$  standard deviation) for articles about women racing drivers for the data collection period was 597 ( $\pm$ 520) words. Examining the word counts by year, there was no relationship between the length of the article and year of publication. However, there were differences evident when examining the word count by each newspaper and their Sunday counterpart. The distribution of the word count for the articles about women racing drivers can be seen in Figure 5. The 'quality' newspapers were found to provide longer articles about women racing drivers. *The Guardian* and *The*

*Observer* had the largest mean word count for articles about women racing drivers at 796 ( $\pm 663$ ) words, which was 87 words more than the mean of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* (709 ( $\pm 498$ ) words). The two ‘tabloid’ newspapers had the lowest mean word counts of the six newspapers for women racing drivers, with *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* having an average word count of just 413 ( $\pm 464$ ) words.

**Figure 5.** Distribution of the word count of articles about women racing drivers by newspaper, 2010-2020.



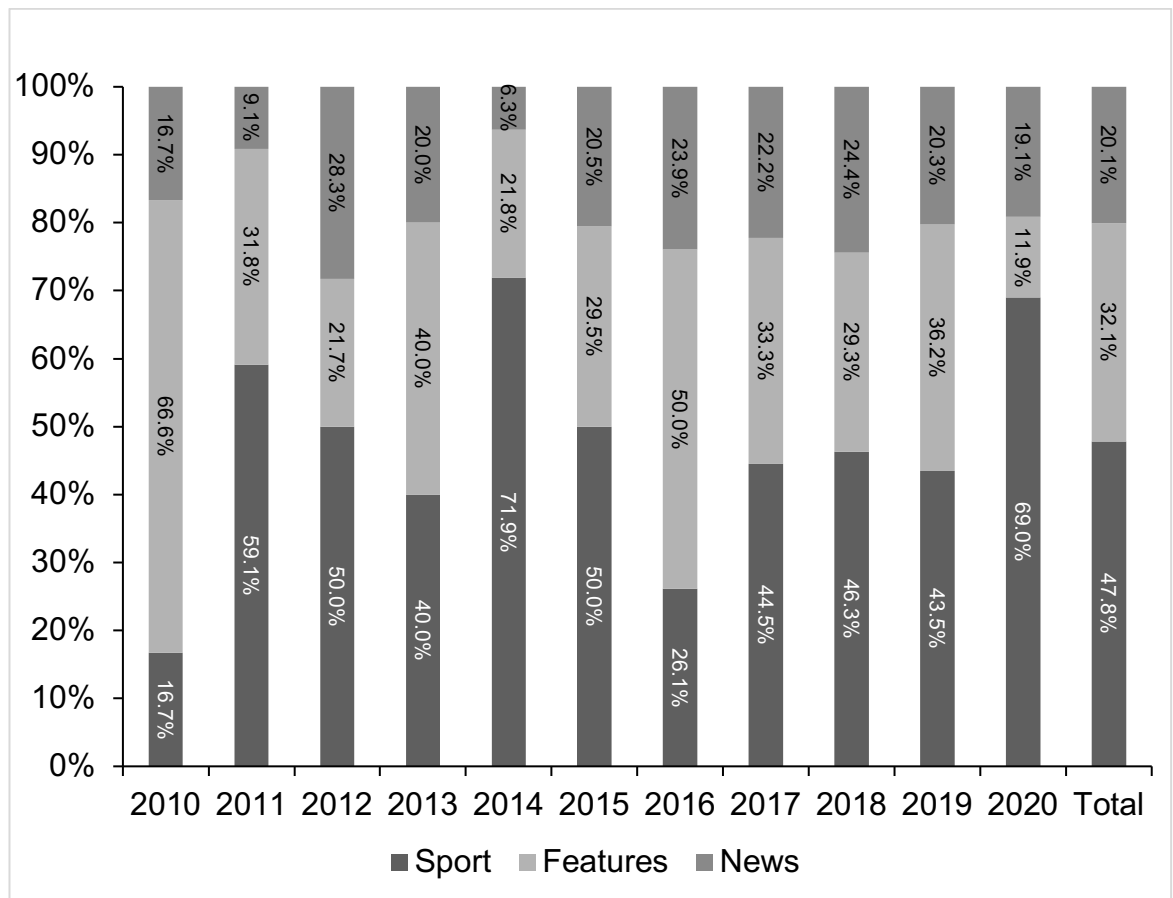
Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.  
 Note. Figures relate to the newspaper and their Sunday counterpart, due to space and ease of reading only the weekday paper is named. Outliers indicated as °.

Finally, the analysis regarding the distribution and construction of the articles examined where the articles about women racing drivers were located in the

newspapers. The article's location in the newspaper determines the type of article, the focus, and the importance given to the article (Godoy-Pressland and Griggs, 2014; Petty and Pope, 2019). Each article was categorised into one of three main sections, news, sport, or features, based on where it was located within the newspaper. It is worth noting that all the newspapers had a motoring or car section which was classified as *features*. The motoring section includes car reviews, car-related news, advice, and features that on occasion, cover motorsport. Due to how LexisNexis Academic had uploaded articles, this data was not available for the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday*. Therefore, the 70 articles from the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* were excluded from this part of the analysis.

Overall, the articles were distributed across the newspapers in the following order: 47.8% of the articles were positioned within the sports section, 32.1% within features, and 20.1% in the news pages. There were no articles on the back page (which is the front page of the sports section) and there was only one article that was on the front page (the front page of the newspaper); this was on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020 in *The Sunday Times* and the article focused on Lewis Hamilton and discussed equality in motorsport, with women racing drivers (generally) being mentioned as an example of inequality in the sport. Of the five newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Observer* had the highest proportion of articles about women racing drivers in the sport section at 66.0%, and the newspaper with the lowest proportion was *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday*, with just 35.8% of articles in the sport section. The analysis also revealed that the distribution of the articles' location varied across the years (see Figure 6). The year with the greatest proportion of articles in the sports section was 2014 with 71.9%, and the year with the lowest proportion of articles in the sports section was 2010 with 16.7%.

**Figure 6.** The overall distribution proportion (%) of the location of articles about women racing drivers by year, excluding The Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday, 2010-2020.



Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

In sum, the articles about women racing drivers were not evenly distributed across the years included in this study. Rather, the articles appeared to have two distinct periods of increased coverage of women racing drivers. Furthermore, there were differences between each newspaper with the two ‘qualities’ having the most articles about women racing drivers, and the ‘tabloid’ *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* having the third highest coverage. Examining the word counts of the articles, there was a difference between the newspapers and newspaper type, with the ‘qualities’ having the highest word count for women racing driver articles. Finally, there were differences in the location of articles in the newspapers over the data collection period.

### **4.3.2. Content of the articles**

The overall content for each of the articles was determined by each article being classified under one of the five following overall themes: 'performance', 'injury/death', 'male-focused', 'position of women in motorsport' or 'other'. The 'performance' category encompassed articles which focused on the racing performance of women racing drivers. For example, *The Daily Mail* (12/08/2019) published an article detailing the final race of the WSeries following which Jamie Chadwick became the inaugural WSeries champion. The second category 'injury and death' was comprised of articles that were centred on an injury or death of a woman racing driver, this included articles about the death of Maria de Villota, who died after suffering injuries testing a Marussia F1 car (*The Observer*, 13/10/2013). 'Male-focused' articles were deemed to focus on men racing drivers but included mentions of women racing drivers within them, these included articles that covered racing performances and the focus on injuries or death of men racing drivers. An example of a 'male-focused' article can be seen in *Daily Express's* (05/07/2014) reporting of Lewis Hamilton's second practice performance and race potential at the 2014 British F1 Grand Prix, where at the end of the article, a paragraph details Susie Wolff's inclusion in the first practice. The fourth category was the 'position of women in motorsport', this category emerged from the pilot analysis. Articles were classified under this category if they were primarily focused on the lack of women participating at the top levels of motorsport and the arguments surrounding segregation of women in the sport. These arguments ranged from the physical and mental ability of women to race motorcars, to the challenges facing women in the sport (such as sponsorship), to initiatives encouraging women into the sport. Finally, the category 'other' included all the articles that did not fit into the other four categories; this included articles about women racing drivers in television programs, TV listings, post-race careers of racing drivers, articles about 'historic' women racing drivers—who had not raced since the year 2000—and articles that mentioned women racing drivers but were not motorsport-related.

Understanding the overall themes of the articles at a macro-level, only 19.8% of the articles were classified as 'performance'. The category 'other' had the greatest proportion of articles at 33.4 %, followed by 21.9% of articles being 'male-focused'. 14.8% of the articles which focused on the 'position of women in the sport' and finally

10% of the articles were based on the 'injury/death' of women racing drivers. There were significant differences identified when examining the distribution of each theme across the data sample period. The coverage produced relating to the 'performance' of women racing drivers was very similar to that observed in Figure 4, with the same two peak periods, and corresponded to when women racing drivers were active within the major motorsport series (see Tables 4-10). Articles with 'death/injury' as the main theme, were predominantly seen in 2012 when 47.9% of the articles with this theme were produced, followed by 18.8% in 2013. It is important to note that if another 11-year sample period was selected this theme may not have been as prevalent due to the high-profile women and men racing drivers who tragically lost their lives between 2010 and 2020 (including Maria de Villota, Jessi Combs, Dan Wheldon, Jules Bianchi, and Anthoine Hubert), an area for future examination. Across the sample period, the distribution of the coverage produced that was 'male-focused' was not evenly distributed; 70% of articles that were 'male-focused' occurred between 2010 and 2015. The remaining 30% of articles produced that focused on men racing drivers were distributed across the years as follows: 5.7% (2016); 2.9% (2017); 4.8% (2018); 6.7% (2019); 10.5% (2020).

Examining the newspapers individually for the whole data collection period (see Table 11), highlighted some differences and similarities between the overall themes of the articles produced by each newspaper. The *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* produced the most coverage out of the six newspapers on the 'performance' of women racing drivers (27.1% of their total coverage), while the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* produced the lowest percentage of total coverage regarding the 'performance' of women racing drivers at just 9.5%. The two 'quality' newspapers produced the least coverage on the 'injury/death' of a racing driver; *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, 9.8%, and *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, 3.8%. There was a similar trend across all the newspapers regarding the proportion of coverage that was 'male-focused' as it ranged from 18.6% to 25.5%. The coverage produced relating to the 'position of women in motorsport' was similar among five of the newspapers with the percentage ranging from 12.3% to 16.0%. However, the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday*, which, as previously mentioned had the highest proportion of women readers, produced 21.4% of its articles about women racing drivers addressing this theme. Finally, the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*

produced the highest amount of content about women racing drivers that was classified as ‘other’ at 42.9%, which was just over 9% higher than the overall percentage (33.4%).

**Table 11.** Overall theme of the articles (%) by newspaper 2010-2020.

|   | Performance | Injury/ Death | Male focused | Position of women in motorsport | Other |
|---|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| <b><i>The Times and The Sunday Times</i></b>    | 17.4%       | 9.8%          | 22.0%        | 12.9%                           | 37.9% |
| <b><i>The Guardian and The Observer</i></b>     | 19.8%       | 3.8%          | 25.5%        | 16.0%                           | 34.9% |
| <b><i>Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday</i></b> | 22.9%       | 15.7%         | 18.6%        | 21.4%                           | 21.4% |
| <b><i>Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror</i></b>    | 27.1%       | 12.5%         | 18.8%        | 14.6%                           | 27.1% |
| <b><i>The Sun and The Sun on Sunday</i></b>     | 22.2%       | 11.1%         | 21.0%        | 12.3%                           | 33.3% |
| <b><i>Daily Express and Sunday Express</i></b>  | 9.5%        | 11.9%         | 23.8%        | 11.9%                           | 42.9% |
| <b>Total</b>                                    | 19.8%       | 10.0%         | 21.9%        | 14.8%                           | 33.4% |

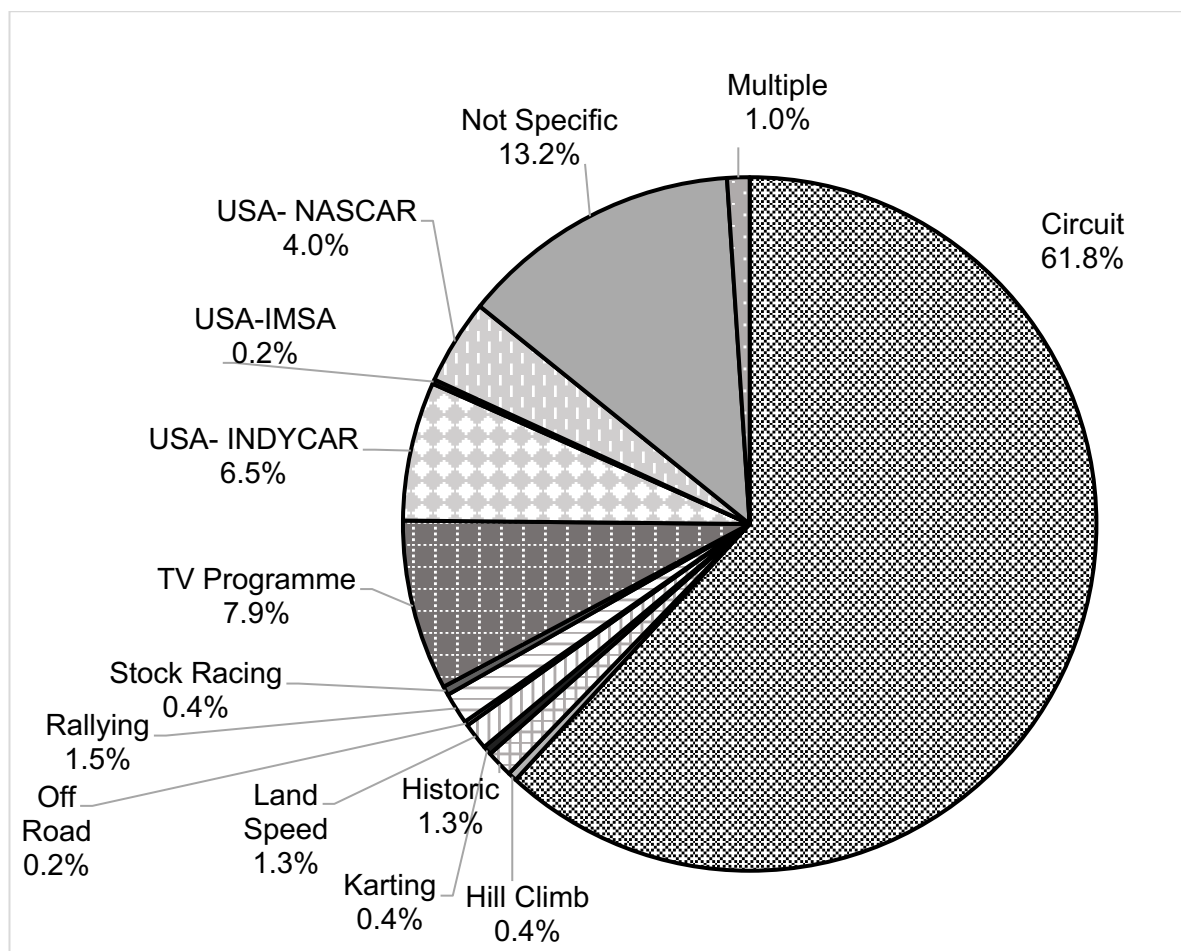
Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

Furthermore, to understand how the media coverage of women racing drivers is organised, the prevalence of motorsport categories within the reporting were analysed. During the data collection, the dominant motorsport category and racing series were recorded for each article. However, there were articles where no discipline or series were mentioned, and cases when multiple disciplines or series were discussed, and as such, they were recorded as non-specific or multiple, respectively. Each article had the motorsport discipline noted (in line with how FIA (FIA, 2021b) and ACCUS (ACCUS, 2021) classify each discipline), and the racing series was also recorded. It is worth noting that as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, motorsport disciplines in the USA are managed by separate regulatory bodies and traditionally the sport has been more spectator-centred<sup>28</sup>. This USA approach differs from the rest of the world where there is a single regulatory body per country

<sup>28</sup> USA based motorsport has traditionally been seen as consumer centric with the spectators’ experiences central to the motor racing event, with race cars being standardised (Henry *et al.*, 2007). For example, music concerts in the evening, multiple support racing series and cars having very little technical differences. It is important to note that FIA sanctioned motorsport has started to move towards being more consumer centric. This can be seen in F1 changing its weekend formats to be more interesting for spectators; in 2003 one-lap qualifying was introduced, qualification moved to the Saturday only, 2006 saw three-part qualification, in 2010 low fuel shoot-outs were reintroduced and in 2021 Sprint races were introduced (F1, 2016; Barretto, 2021).

following the FIA guidance and racing is more technically-centred (Henry *et al.*, 2007). Thus, it is important that the USA disciplines be separated from those defined by the FIA as they are not regulated in the same manner.

**Figure 7.** Motorsport categories that are associated with women racing drivers in the articles 2010-2020.



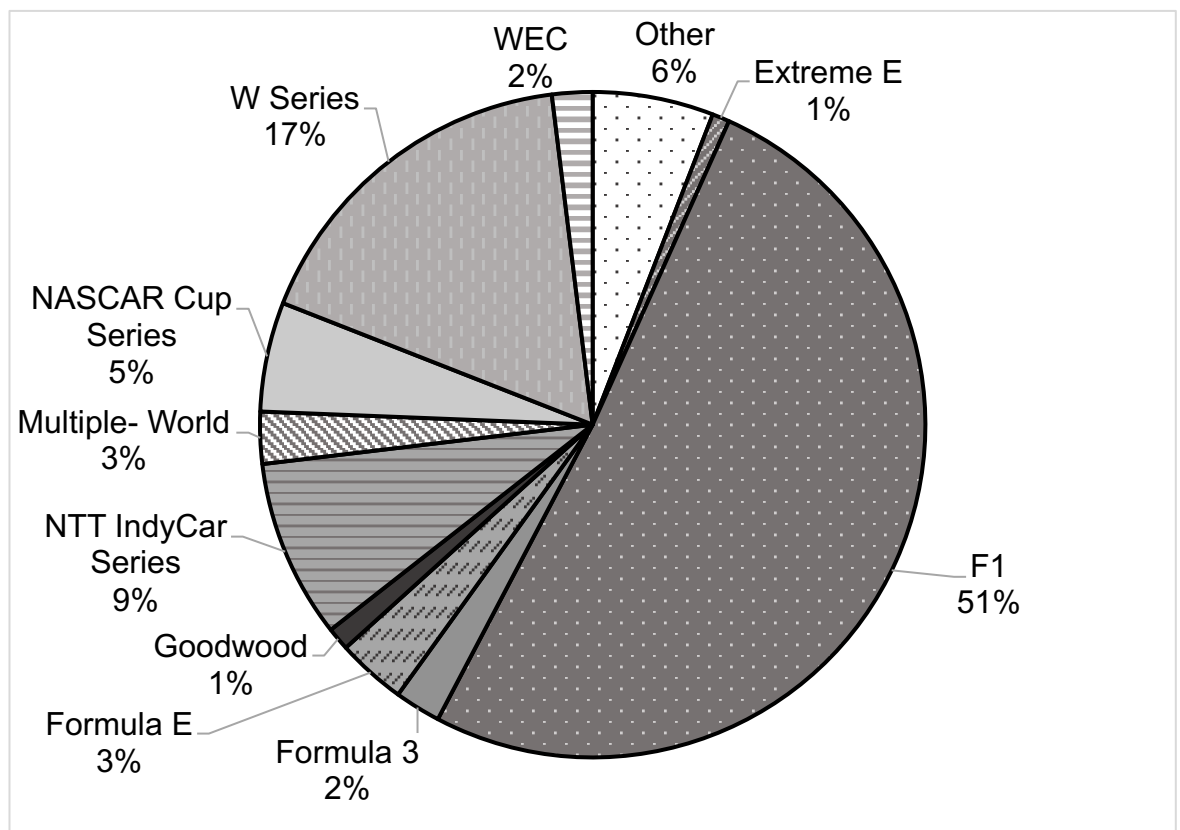
Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic

The data analysis found that 61.8% of articles about women racing drivers were centred around circuit racing (see Figure 7). This was the dominant category reported from 2012 to 2020. The second most reported motorsport category that women racing drivers competed in was USA -NTT INDYCAR and this dominated the coverage during 2010 and 2011. A significant proportion of the remaining articles did not have a specific motorsport category mentioned in the article or were focused on women racing drivers in TV programmes, such as *Top Gear*, *Fifth Gear* or *The Grand Tour*.



With regard to each individual newspaper there were differences in the number of motorsport categories that were reported on: *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* (n=8); *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* (n=7); *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* (n=6); *The Guardian* and *The Observer* (n=6); *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* (n=4); *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* (n=3). The only category that all the newspapers reported on was circuit racing.

**Figure 8.** Shows the motorsport series that women racing drivers are associated with in the articles 2010-2020.

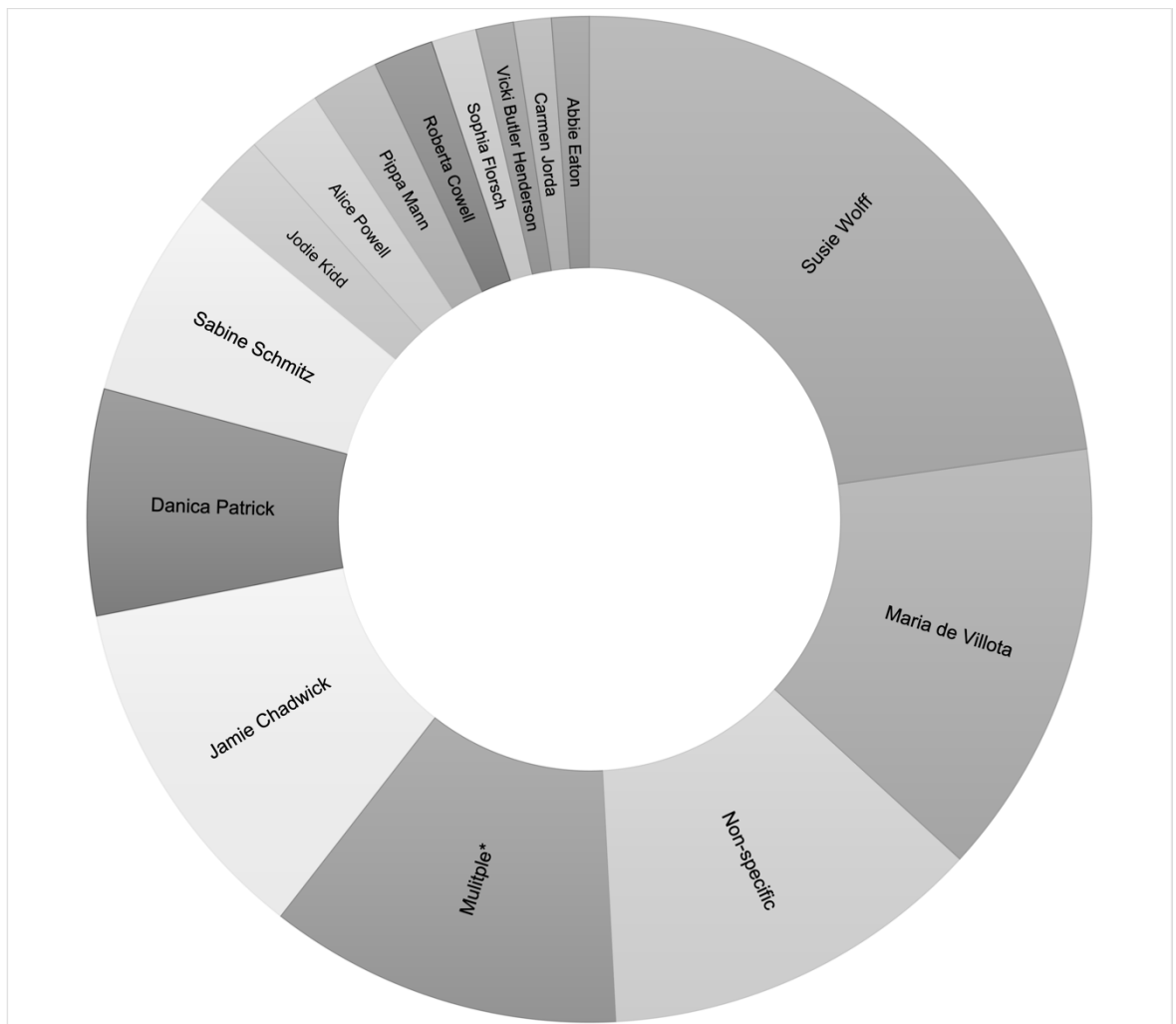


Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

In total there were 30 racing series associated with women racing drivers in the 357 articles that mentioned a motorsport series. The data also showed that, out of the racing series that women racing drivers were associated with, F1 was featured in over half of the articles (see Figure 8). Of note, the circuit-based, women-only racing series, W Series, which only launched in 2019 and was postponed for the 2020 season (W Series, 2020a), was the second most reported motorsport series associated with the women racing drivers with 17% of the coverage. The only other motorsport series to have 5% or more of the coverage were the two most popular

American series (Henry *et al.*, 2007), NTT IndyCar Series (9% of coverage) and NASCAR Cup Series (5% of coverage).

**Figure 9.** Named woman racing drivers who appeared five or more times in articles, 2010-2020.



Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

\*Indicates where more than one woman racing driver is discussed in depth in an article.

Reflecting the trend in the motorsport categories and racing series that are reported, women who have been involved in F1 and WSeries were the focus of the majority of articles about women racing drivers (See Figure 9). In total, there were 59 different women racing drivers reported on across the data sample. Of the articles that focused on a single driver, the British racing driver Susie Wolff was the most reported racing driver; she was the focus of 19.4% of the articles (n=93). Following Susie Wolff, the second most reported racing driver was the late Spaniard, Maria de Villota, with 12.1% of articles (n=58). The British racer Jamie Chadwick was the third

most reported (9.8%), followed by the American racer Danica Patrick (6.3%) and the late German racing driver and *Top Gear* presenter Sabine Schmitz (5.8%). There was only one racing driver who had more than five articles focused on them but was not an active woman racing driver at the time of the newspaper reporting; this was the late British driver, Roberta Cowell.

The overall themes of articles for the top five most reported women racing drivers are very different compared to each other, see Table 12. Of the five, the only driver who is currently racing (at the time of writing), Chadwick, is also the only driver to have more than 60% of articles written about her fall into the ‘performance’ category, considerably more than any other woman racing driver, who had articles written about their ‘performance’. Despite being an active competitor during the period of articles being written about her, Schmitz only had one article written about her ‘performance’ as a racing driver, with the rest of the articles falling into the ‘other’ category. In her case, the majority of these ‘other’ articles were focused on her position as a presenter on the television show *Top Gear*.

**Table 12.** The overall theme (% and number) of the articles about the top five most reported women racing drivers, 2010-2020.

|                         | Performance | Injury/<br>Death | Men<br>Focused | Position of<br>Women in<br>Motorsport | Other       |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Susie Wolff</b>      | 21<br>22.6% | 0<br>0%          | 31<br>33.3%    | 14<br>15.1%                           | 27<br>29.0% |
| <b>Maria de Villota</b> | 2<br>3.5%   | 25<br>43.1%      | 25<br>43.1%    | 0<br>0%                               | 6<br>10.3%  |
| <b>Jamie Chadwick</b>   | 30<br>63.8% | 0<br>0%          | 5<br>10.6%     | 5<br>10.6%                            | 7<br>15%    |
| <b>Danica Patrick</b>   | 9<br>30.0%  | 1<br>3.3%        | 9<br>30.0%     | 1<br>3.3%                             | 10<br>33.4% |
| <b>Sabine Schmitz</b>   | 1<br>3.6%   | 0<br>0%          | 0<br>0%        | 0<br>0%                               | 27<br>96.4% |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

In sum, there was a significant focus within the reporting of the newspapers sampled in this research on circuit racing (61.8%). Furthermore, the focus was centred around two motorsport series, F1 (51%) and WSeries (17%). As a result, the women racing drivers who were most written about were those who participated in these series, Wolff, de Villota, and Chadwick. It is worth noting that although de Villota suffered a serious injury that resulted in her death had this not been the case, she

may still have been in the top five most reported women racing drivers due to her involvement in F1.

### 4.3.3. Authorship of the articles

Finally, the authorship of the articles was analysed. For each article the gender of the author was recorded during the data collection (see Table 13). The journalist's gender was ascertained from searching within their newspaper's online profile. The articles were assigned to the following categories<sup>29</sup>: 'man', 'woman', 'multiple mixed'. Articles that were written by more than one author with the same gender were classified under the gender of the multiple journalists, if there was a mix of genders they were classified as 'multiple mixed'. It should be noted that for 119 articles (24%) LexisNexis Academic provided no journalist's name. These were categorised as 'not specified'.

**Table 13.** The total number of articles by the gendered authorship, 2010-2020.

|  | Men | Women | Multiple mixed | Not specified* |
|--|-----|-------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>The Times and The Sunday Times</i>    | 62  | 36    | 0              | 34             |
| <i>The Guardian and The Observer</i>     | 76  | 21    | 2              | 7              |
| <i>Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday</i> | 44  | 5     | 0              | 21             |
| <i>Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror</i>    | 27  | 7     | 0              | 14             |
| <i>The Sun and The Sun on Sunday</i>     | 41  | 9     | 0              | 31             |
| <i>Daily Express and Sunday Express</i>  | 19  | 10    | 1              | 12             |
| <b>Total</b>                             | 269 | 88    | 3              | 119            |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

\*LexisNexis Academic does not report the name of the journalist on all articles.

Of the 360 articles about women racing drivers that had the journalists' names declared, 74.7% were written by men, 24.5% by women and 0.8% were co-written by journalists of both genders. *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* had the highest

<sup>29</sup> As discussed earlier this thesis recognises that there are multiple gender identities, and these classifications were based on the pronouns provided by the newspapers or journalists.

proportion (36.7%) of articles written by women, followed by the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* (33.3%). The newspaper with the lowest proportion of articles written by women was *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* (10.2%).

In total, there were 181 journalists who had written the articles about women racing drivers. Of these, 66 were women journalists and 115 were men. However, there were five journalists that had written significantly more articles than the other journalists, all of them were sports journalists<sup>30</sup> and men. The journalist who wrote the most articles (n=33) was Giles Richards, a current *Guardian* sportswriter, followed by Kevin Eason (n=26), who was during the data collection period (up to December 2016) the F1 correspondent for *The Times*. The other three journalists were Jonathan McEvoy, current motorsport correspondent at *The Daily Mail*; Ben Hunt, current F1 writer from *The Sun*; and Paul Weaver, who was during the data collection period the F1 correspondent from *The Guardian*.

#### **4.4. ‘Gentlemen start your engines’ Understanding how the British newspapers represented men racing drivers in 2010 and 2020 for comparison to women.**

While analysing the qualitative and quantitative data for women racing drivers, there was a reoccurring question when trying to ascertain the representation of women racing drivers in the British newspapers; are these findings in line with or do they differ from how men racing drivers are represented? There has been little research on the representation of men racing drivers in British print newspapers (e.g. Farrington *et al.*, 2012; Robeers, 2019a). Therefore, to understand if women were being treated differently to men, articles about men racing drivers were collected for the first 12 months of the data collection period (1st January 2010 to 31st December 2010) and for the last 12 months of the data collection period (1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020). The first and last year of the sample period of women racing drivers was chosen as previous research suggests that the coverage of sportsmen

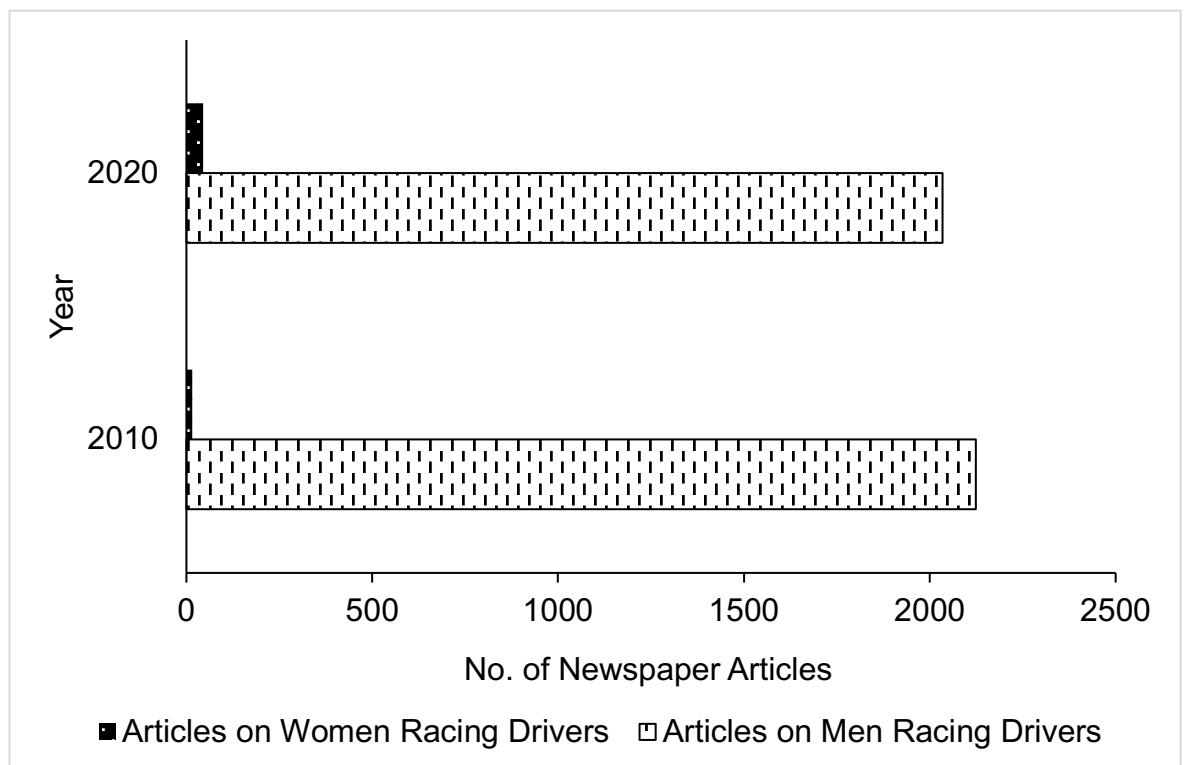
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<sup>30</sup> Sports journalists differ from ‘other’ journalists as the nature of the sports media nexus has implications on the relationships of the reporting. Additionally, unlike ‘other’ journalists, sports journalists have a ‘love’ of the sport they are reporting on, many only report on one sport or team, and have been found to be very loyal to their contacts rather than their media organisations or colleagues. As a result, sports journalists have an in-depth understanding of the sport they are reporting on and their own biases in reporting, compared to ‘other’ journalists who are reporting for news or features (see Lowden, 2015).

has been found to remain relatively consistent (Packer *et al.*, 2015; Schmidt, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). This additional data collected allowed for comparisons to be made between men racing drivers and women racing drivers—an area of research that has not previously been examined.

For the two one-year periods (2010 and 2020), there were 4,219 articles collected in total when combining the articles for men and women racing drivers; 4,159 articles (98.6%) covered men racing drivers, and 60 articles (1.4%) covered women racing drivers. It is important to note that articles that focused primarily on men racing drivers may have mentioned women and thus sit in both data sets. For example, an article about the 2010 Indianapolis 500 focused on the male driver Dario Franchetti and included a reference to Danica Patrick; thus, it will be in each gender's article count as an individual case. Likewise, some articles focused on women racing drivers that also mentioned men racing drivers, so they too were included in both data sets as individual entries.

**Figure 10.** The total number of newspaper articles for women and men racing drivers for the years 2010 and 2020.



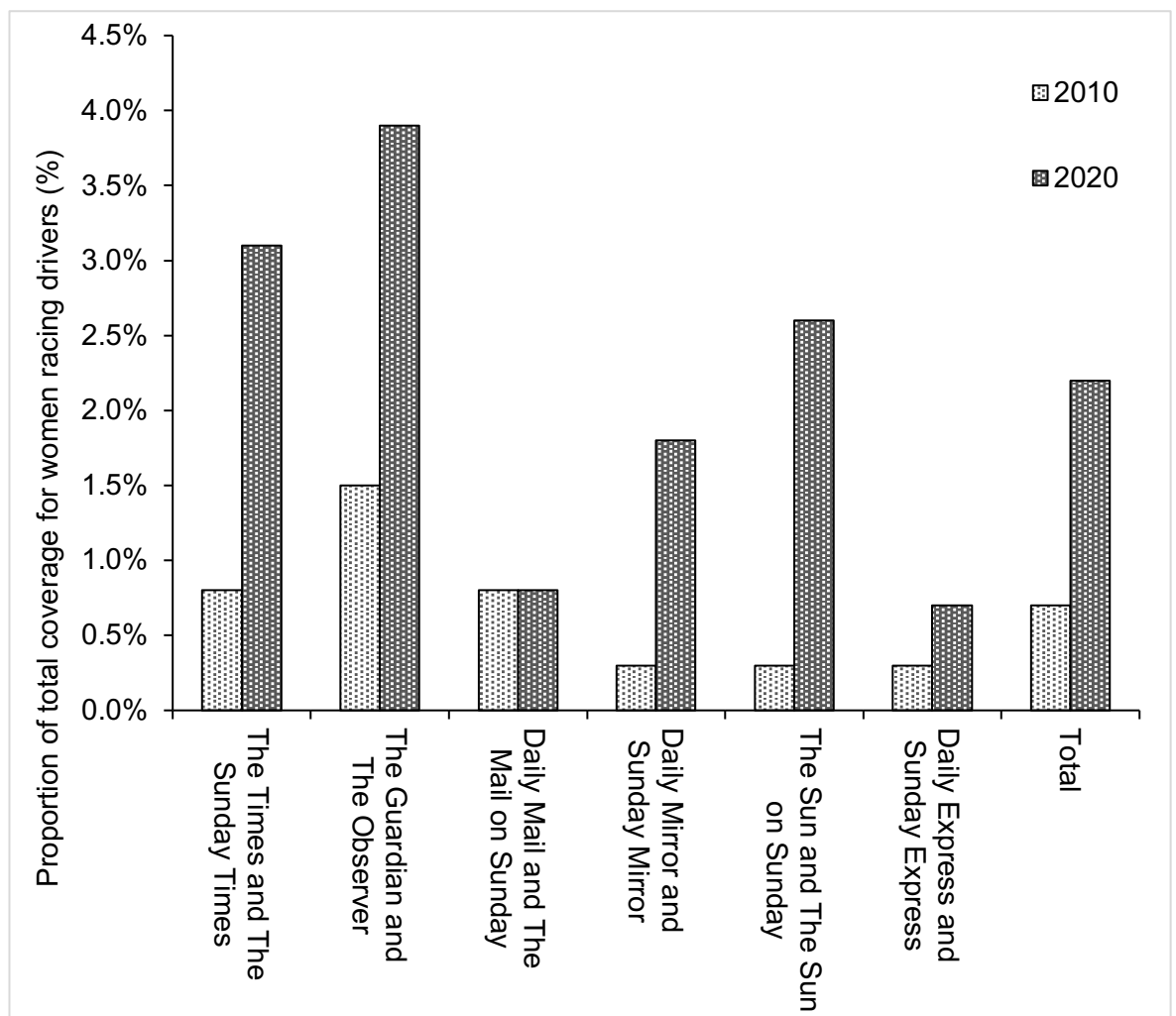
Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

Initially, the data was examined to understand if there were differences in the total number of articles between the men and women racing drivers. In 2010, there were 2,124 articles (99.3%) about men racing drivers, whereas there were only 15 articles about women racing drivers. In 2020, there were 2,035 articles (97.8%) for men racing drivers and 45 for women racing drivers (see Figure 10). Thus, there was a significant difference in the number of articles written about men racing drivers and women racing drivers in both 2010 and 2020. Additionally, to establish if there was a statistically significant difference between the total proportion of coverage to women racing drivers in 2010 compared to 2020, a chi-square test of homogeneity was conducted on the data. This test showed that there was a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) between 2010 and 2020 in the proportion of coverage given to women racing drivers. In 2020, there was an increase in the number of newspaper articles about women racing drivers with 45 newspapers articles (2.2%) compared to 15 newspaper articles (0.7%) in 2010, a difference in proportions of 0.015,  $p < 0.001$ .

Having the data for the coverage of men racing drivers allowed for comparison of how individual newspapers divide their coverage by gender. All the newspapers, bar one, had an increase in the proportion of articles about women racing drivers; this is illustrated in Figure 11. Most of the newspapers had a slight reduction or were relatively consistent in the combined total number of articles in 2010 and 2020 for men and women racing drivers, except for *The Sun*, which increased by 43%. This increase was predominately due to a 40% increase in the number of articles about men racing drivers between 2010 and 2020. It is worth noting that *The Sun* did not have a Sunday counterpart until February 2012 after the collapse of the sister paper *The News of the World*, and thus the inclusion of *The Sun on Sunday* may have increased the motorsport coverage of the newspaper. The two 'quality' newspapers had the highest proportion of their total articles about racing drivers focused on women in both 2010 and 2020 (the two one-year periods when articles about men were collected). In 2020, the 'tabloids' were second to the 'qualities' in relation to the total proportion of coverage given to women racing drivers. Notably, *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* had the third-highest proportion of articles for women racing drivers in 2020 at 2.6% (when comparing the article about women to men), compared to being one of the lowest newspapers in 2010. Finally, the two 'mid-

market' newspapers had the lowest proportions of coverage on women racing drivers in 2020; it is worth noting that these two newspapers had the highest percentage of female readers out of the six newspapers (PAMCo, 2021b).

**Figure 11.** The proportion of the overall coverage given to women racing drivers for 2010 and 2020.



Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

In addition to the number of articles, the word count of the articles was examined to understand if there was a difference in the length of articles devoted to each gender. When the mean article length for articles about men racing drivers was examined for 2010 and 2020, the word count ( $\pm$ SD) for men racing drivers remained largely consistent; the word count in 2010 was 514 ( $\pm$ 459) words, and in 2020 the word count was 490 ( $\pm$ 424) a variance of 24 words. Regarding the overall means for word count by newspaper for men's articles, *The Times* had the greatest mean word count at 700 ( $\pm$ 587), followed by *Daily Mail* with 690 ( $\pm$ 500) words. The other 'quality'



newspaper, *The Guardian*, had the third-highest word count at 634 ( $\pm 374$ ) words. *Daily Express* was fourth with 366 ( $\pm 294$ ) words, followed by *The Sun* at 319 ( $\pm 295$ ) words. The newspaper with the lowest word count was *Daily Mirror*, with only 311 ( $\pm 270$ ) words. Between *The Times* and *Daily Mirror*, there was a difference in the mean word counts of 389 words.

The overall mean word count and standard deviation ( $\pm$ SD) for men racing drivers (2010 and 2020) and for women racing drivers (2010-2020) for each newspaper can be seen in Table 14. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine if there were differences in overall word count between articles about women and men racing drivers. The distribution of the word counts for men and women were similar when compared in SPSS. The median word count for articles about women racing drivers was 496 and for men racing drivers it was 396; these were statistically significantly different,  $U = 1114962$ ,  $z = 4.332$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ . Thus, the data suggests that women racing drivers' articles are on average longer than those about men.

**Table 14.** The overall mean word count and standard deviation ( $\pm$ SD) for men racing drivers (2010 and 2020) and for women racing drivers (2010-2020).

|   | Overall Mean Word Count for Women Racing Drivers ( $\pm$ SD) | Overall Mean Word Count for Men Racing Drivers ( $\pm$ SD) |
|---|--|--|
| <b><i>The Times and The Sunday Times</i></b>    | 709 ( $\pm 498$ )  | 700 ( $\pm 587$ )*   |
| <b><i>The Guardian and The Observer</i></b>     | 796 ( $\pm 663$ )  | 635 ( $\pm 374$ )  |
| <b><i>Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday</i></b> | 511 ( $\pm 399$ )  | 690 ( $\pm 500$ )  |
| <b><i>Daily Express and Sunday Express</i></b>  | 444 ( $\pm 21$ )   | 366 ( $\pm 294$ )  |
| <b><i>Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror</i></b>    | 421 ( $\pm 370$ )  | 311 ( $\pm 270$ )  |
| <b><i>The Sun and The Sun on Sunday</i></b>     | 413 ( $\pm 464$ )  | 319 ( $\pm 295$ )  |
| <b>Total</b>                                    | 597 ( $\pm 520$ )  | 502 ( $\pm 442$ )  |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

Note. The data for articles about men racing drivers was for two one-year periods, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010, and January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Whereas for women racing drivers', the data was collected between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. \* In 2010, four articles not included as word count was over 20k and one in 2020; these were complete listings of honours that included all individuals nominated.

In sum, this exploratory research has indicated that, like sportswomen, women racing drivers have considerably fewer articles produced about them in British

newspapers than their male peers. Regarding the articles' word counts, there was a statistically significant difference in the average word count of articles between the two genders, with women racing drivers' articles being, on average longer than those about men. This will be discussed further in the following section as it suggests that although they get less coverage overall, individual articles about women racing drivers are longer on average than those written about men. However, there was very little difference in the ranking of the newspapers according to word count between the two genders. On the whole the newspapers followed the pattern of highest word count, (1) quality, (2) mid-market, and (3) tabloid, which is, as discussed in Chapter 3, the general rule of the length of newspaper articles by type (Tunstall, 1996).

#### ***4.5. Discussion of Findings***

There has been very little research into how women racing drivers are represented in printed media. Thus, the aim of this research was to provide the first quantitative insights into the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers. The main findings of this quantitative research, which will be discussed below, are the visibility of women racing drivers, changes in the representation, differences between newspapers and finally the dominance of F1 in the coverage.

##### ***4.5.1. Visibility of women racing drivers in British newspapers***

Despite the fact that there are significantly fewer women racing drivers than men, between 2010 and 2020 there were women racing in many of the top racing series, albeit in limited numbers. Women racing drivers tended to race in individual races rather than for entire seasons. Like men, to race in these series is an achievement; not only were women present, but they also did on occasion appear on podiums (as discussed earlier in the chapter). All bar one of the racing series were sex-integrated, with women and men competing directly against each other. Women racing drivers were visible, in various racing series, across the different motorsport disciplines between 2010 and 2020. There was no single year where there was not a woman racing in one of the series.

Regarding the six British newspapers' coverage in the sample, women racing drivers were more visible in 2020 than in 2010. This increase in coverage was statistically significant; for every article in 2010, there were three in 2020. However, although these findings show an improvement in the coverage, when the coverage of male racing drivers is considered, the results highlight a gross imbalance in the overall coverage towards men and away from women. In 2010 for every article about women racing drivers there were approximately 141 articles about men. Despite the increase in coverage in 2020, there were still 45 articles about men to each one about women. Thus, women racing drivers are barely visible in British newspapers.

The findings of this research show that proportionally, women racing drivers received only 1.4% of the total articles (for the two one-year periods 2010 and 2020), thus reinforcing previous research that has highlighted that sportswomen receive considerably less coverage in UK newspapers compared to sportsmen (Godoy-Pressland, 2014b; Schmidt, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). It is worth noting that the proportion of articles about women racing drivers compared to men is lower than previously found in studies comparing newspaper coverage of sportswomen to sportsmen. The lowest proportion of sportswomen's coverage in British newspapers was found to be 3.0% (Schmidt, 2018), which is just over double the proportion found in this current study. What this suggests is that women racing drivers are marginalised to a greater extent in British newspaper coverage than sportswomen in general.

Several reasons could account for the lower proportion of articles about women racing drivers in this current study compared to sportswomen in general. One possible explanation could be the relatively low number of women participating in motorsport compared to women competing in sport in general. Women accounted for only 5% of British racing drivers in 2020 (Motorsport UK, 2020e), whereas in British sport, 46% of UK Sport funded athletes were women (UK Sport, 2020). However, the proportion of articles about women racing drivers in 2020 does not equate to the proportion of women holding British racing licences, reinforcing the underrepresentation of women racing drivers in British newspapers. Alternatively, the underrepresentation of women racing drivers in the media may be due to the lack of women competing in the top echelons of the sport and that motorsport in general receives less coverage compared to other sports such as football, which in

both cases reduces the opportunities for reporting on women racing drivers. However, the reasons and causes for this disparity between the number of articles about men and women racing drivers cannot be determined from a quantitative perspective. Hence interviews with motorsport journalists in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 provide context to these results through qualitative data. Furthermore, the gender inequality in the reporting of racing drivers found in this research opens the opportunity for further research to understand whether this underrepresentation of women racing drivers in British newspapers has always been the case. Future research may investigate the periods where there have been greater proportions of women racing in general and in the top echelons of the sport (especially F1).

Despite the low number of articles about women racing drivers, it is encouraging that the proportion of articles has increased during the past decade, from 0.7% in 2010 to 2.2% in 2020. Although there was a small, but statistically significant, increase in the visibility of women racing drivers from 2010 to 2020 in British newspapers, there is still a gulf between the coverage of women and men racing drivers. It is worth noting that the increase in the coverage between the start and the end of the sample was not linear. Instead, over the 11 years, the coverage of women racing drivers was more nuanced. The overall increase in coverage for women racing drivers was a somewhat surprising finding as it contradicts several recent studies that have suggested a decline in the proportion of coverage of sportswomen compared to sportsmen (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Frideres and Palao, 2019). Moreover, this finding adds further evidence to Petty and Pope's (2019, p. 492) suggestion that there has been "a more positive shift in media representations" of sportswomen in the British print media, which was also the tentative view of O'Neill and Mulready (2015), who examined the same newspapers as this study (with the addition of *The Telegraph*).

The increase in articles about women racing drivers could have resulted from several changes in the sport over the past decade. These have included: increased visibility of women competing at the highest levels of the sport; the formation and television exposure of the two new racing series, W Series and Extreme E, that include women racing drivers; equality campaigns to encourage women into the sport. Shifting attitudes and perceptions of women participating in sport as a whole could have also resulted in the changes identified. The potential reasons for the

increase in coverage are further examined in Chapter 7, where journalists and women racing drivers express their opinions on why these changes may have occurred.

In addition to the number of articles, the position within the newspaper and length of articles provided insights into the type of coverage and how much coverage was given to women racing drivers. The results of this study found that there were no clear trends in the word count of articles about women racing drivers across the years. However, there was a significant difference between articles about women and men racing drivers, with articles about women tending to be longer than those about men. The results for the word count of the articles differ from the findings of Packer *et al.* (2015), Schmidt (2016) and Biscomb and Matheson (2019) who all found that articles about sportswomen tended to be shorter than those about sportsmen or research that found no difference in word count between the genders (Schmidt, 2018; Frideres and Palao, 2019). Further, Biscomb and Matheson (2019) also found a decrease in the average length of articles about sportswomen over time. However, the lack of change in word count over the years found in this study is broadly consistent with the findings of Schmidt (2018).

Godoy-Pressland and Griggs (2014) suggested that the location of articles about sportswomen indicates how newsworthy they are. The location of the articles about women racing drivers in this current study found that only 47.8% of the articles were positioned within the sports section. Unexpectedly (as the overall topic was sport-based) 32.1% of the articles were located in the features section and 20.1% were in the news pages. Only one article was on the front page, and this was male-focused. Thus, there was an invisibility of women racing drivers on the back or front pages of the examined British newspapers, possibly signalling that woman racing drivers are not seen as important. However, this may be the case with motorsport as a whole as British newspaper coverage is dominated by football (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019), and thus future research could investigate the prominence of motorsport in newspaper coverage as a whole.

A possible explanation for the location and article length of articles about women racing drivers could be the scarcity of women racing drivers in the sport. Thus, longer articles may be written as women racing drivers are seen as anomalies in

the sport, and this could also account for the large proportion of articles in the features section of the newspapers. Another possible explanation for the word count of articles about women racing drivers being longer on average than article about male racing drivers, was that the inclusion of articles that were 'male-focused' in the women racing driver data set which could have skewed the results. It is worth noting that articles which were exclusively about women racing drivers (classified as 'performance') had a much lower word count than the mean; 60% of these articles had a word count of less than 500 words. Thus, further research is required to understand if articles solely about women racing drivers are longer than articles solely about male racing drivers, which was beyond the scope of this research.

Finally, although not the focus of this research, the gender of those that had written the articles about women racing drivers was documented. Of the articles with a by-line, 24.5% were written by women. Although the results reflect the dominance of men in sports journalism that has been found in previous studies, the proportion of women journalists writing about women racing drivers was significantly higher than the reported proportion of female sports journalists found in previous research (O'Neill and Mulready, 2015; Franks and O'Neill, 2016; Schmidt, 2018). However, this research is more reflective of the findings of Cochrane (2011), who found an overall 78:22 (male: female) ratio in British newspapers' journalists (across all section, excluding cartoons, weather and games). The greater proportion of articles written by women found in this research compared to those found to be written by women sports journalists in previous research, could be due to fact the articles about women racing drivers within the newspapers were not solely in the sports sections, but in a range of locations. The proportion of women writing about motorsport, albeit lower than men, can be seen as positive and suggests that women journalists are not being confined to only reporting on 'female appropriate' sports as found in previous research (such as O'Neill and Mulready, 2015). The dominance of men in journalism in the reporting of women racing drivers could contribute to articles being written from a masculine perspective thus preserving the status quo of coverage given to men (qualitative analysis of narratives is needed to confirm this). Biscomb and Matheson (2019, p. 277) agree with this notion, stating that "the dominance of male sports journalists results in reporting maintaining a masculine slant while still paying lip-service to social changes which have occurred elsewhere". However,

during the collection of the data for articles about men racing drivers, it was noted that Rebecca Clancy was *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*' motorsport correspondent in 2020. Further investigation showed that she was the country's first female motorsport correspondent in a national newspaper starting this role in November 2016 (Sports Journalist's Association, 2016). This is an interesting development in British motorsport coverage, and it is worth monitoring in the future, to see if more women are given the motorsport beat and how this affects coverage.

#### ***4.5.2. Are times changing in British newspapers' reporting of women racing drivers?***

In addition to the increase in the coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers, an interesting finding from this research is that there appears to be a shift in focus towards performance in reporting. Of the articles that were classified as 'performance', 43% occurred between 2019 and 2020. The reporting on Chadwick is a good example of this shift as articles about her appeared from 2017 and the four other most reported drivers raced prior to 2017, with Patrick retiring in 2018. Of the articles about Chadwick, 64% reported on her performance; the attention given to Chadwick's performance was 34% higher than that of Patrick who had the most coverage dedicated to her performance out of the other four women racing drivers (see Table 12). Thus, these findings suggest a potential shift in the British newspapers focusing more on the sporting performance of women racing drivers than previously. These findings add support to the emerging trend in sports media research that suggests the media is improving its reporting of sportswomen (McLachlan, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019). As a result, it could be argued that women racing drivers are starting to be seen in British newspapers as legitimate athletes and being treated in a manner that male racing drivers are more accustomed to, with the focus of articles on their performance rather than non-task related topics. However, the nature of this change cannot be identified through a quantitative approach, thus qualitative analysis of the articles is required to gain insight into the narratives of the articles.

Taking the results at face value it appeared that there was a significant increase in the number of articles about women racing drivers from 2010 to 2020 (200%). However, if you exclude 2020 and instead compare 2010 to 2019, the increase of

coverage of women racing drivers is even greater (453%). Thus, there was a significant reduction in the volume of reporting about women racing drivers between 2019 and 2020, which cannot be ignored. A possible explanation for this is the Covid-19 pandemic which swept across the globe in early 2020 and had a major impact on sport. Notably, there was a clear gender divide in the response to the pandemic from sporting bodies. Unlike men's sport which on the whole saw ongoing competitions shortened and those due to start in spring 2020 delayed, as was the case for F1 (BBC Sport, 2020), many women-only sports' seasons were cancelled completely (Department of Culture Sport and Media, 2020a). Motorsport was not excluded from this as the WSeries was cancelled for 2020 and not rescheduled (WSeries, 2020a). Such was the gender discrepancy in the reaction to Covid-19 of sports governing bodies, the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee highlighted their concern regarding the impact on women's sport:

The lack of visibility of women's sport this summer risks undoing work to improve funding for women's elite sport. Cancellation of women's events is likely to reduce the number of women being inspired to take part in sporting activities. In its response to this report, the Government should outline how it intends to support women's sport post-crisis and ensure that, going forward, men's elite sports are not further prioritised at the expense of the women's game.

(Department of Culture Sport and Media, 2020a:Section 2 Part 36)

On a more positive note, there were several international series that women racing drivers were able to race in as they were only postponed, as described in the first section of this chapter. Notably in 2020 there were two all-women teams—Iron Lynx (part of the Iron Dames project) and Richard Mille Racing Team—racing in the 24 hours of Le Mans, the first time two all-women teams had raced in Le Mans since the mid-1970s (FIA, 2020a). Research has already started on the impact of Covid-19 on sportswomen (Symons *et al.*, 2022), which reflects the concerns of the DCMS, but further research is required to understand the full extent of Covid-19 on women in sport and understand how Covid-19 has (re)shaped the landscape of women's sport and women in motorsport.

#### **4.5.3. Dominance of F1 in motorsport reporting**

The dominance of F1 coverage in the newspapers impacted on the coverage of women racing drivers as during the data sample period no women were competing



in the series, however when women were involved with F1 teams it afforded them increased coverage in newspapers. As previously mentioned, the nuanced distribution of articles about women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020 reflects when women have been involved in F1 (see Table 4). The first period of increased coverage occurs when de Villota, Wolff and Jordá were involved with F1 teams as test drivers. Moreover, the significant reduction of coverage in 2017 from 2016 occurred when there were no women involved in F1 as test drivers. Additionally, the number of articles about women racing drivers significantly increased again in 2018 when Calderón was promoted to test driver. The coverage peaked in 2019 coinciding with the launch of the WSeries, as mentioned previously this was launched to address the lack of women in F1, and the signing of Chadwick to the Williams F1 Team (JCR, 2021). This correlation may be coincidental, however when combined with the analysis of the content of the articles the fixation of the British newspapers on F1 becomes more evident. Circuit racing was the focus of 62% of the articles, with over half (51%) of all the articles about women racing drivers focused on F1. Further evidence of the obsession with F1 in the reporting of women racing drivers can be seen in the findings as the three most reported racing drivers were F1 test drivers, Wolff, de Villota, and Chadwick.

The dominance of F1 in the reporting of women racing drivers is unsurprising. The findings of this research reflect that of previous research which found that British media's reporting is dominated by open wheeled circuit racing, specifically F1 (Matthews and Pike, 2016; Robeers, 2019c). This could be, in part, due to the history of F1 in Britain, the continuance of Britain being home to seven of the ten F1 teams (F1, 2021b), or the persistent success of British racing drivers in the series—Lewis Hamilton was F1 world champion six times between 2010 and 2020 and is the most successful British F1 driver of all time (F1, 2021a). Another possible explanation for the increased coverage of women involved in F1 may be that although they did not actually compete in any races their involvement in F1, the 'pinnacle' of motorsport, was in itself deemed worthy of media coverage. It is worth noting that the quantitative data examined cannot provide insight into this hypothesis alone, and further qualitative investigation is required to explore this possibility. Furthermore, Wolff and Chadwick are both British and thus may evoke nationalism in the media's desire to report them, reflective of the 'mundane'

nationalism identified in motorsport reporting in British newspapers for men (Schep, 2023). Previous research corroborates these possible explanations as successful sportswomen have been found to receive more coverage in the media, especially if they are from the nation in which the newspapers reporting them are based (Godoy-Pressland, 2014b; Cooky, Messner and Musto, 2015; Fink, 2015; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). The quantitative nature of the data does not allow for an understanding of how the articles frame and represent these women racing drivers in the articles. Hence the need for the qualitative analysis of the articles in Chapter 5 to understand if these women are being deemed as successful and or written about in a nationalised way.

This focus of the British media on just one racing series has possible implications for women racing drivers. Women drivers are virtually invisible in British newspapers if they compete in series that are not F1. Furthermore, it is possible that women racing drivers could only be regarded as successful if they reach F1, as F1 appears to be the normalised reporting standard in British newspapers. Additionally, there could be implications for such narrow coverage of women racing drivers in the involvement, aspirations, and grassroots development of girls and women in motorsport. As such a circular process may occur where the lack of coverage of women racing drives feeds into a lack of participation which results in fewer women racing drivers and in turn causes a lack of coverage. Further research is required to understand the fixation with F1 in British newspapers and to understand if this is a relatively recent change or if it is an enduring feature of motorsport coverage.

#### **4.5.4. Newspaper differences**

Finally, the study found that there were differences in how different newspaper types reported women racing drivers. The 'quality' newspapers generally provided better coverage to women racing drivers in terms of the number of articles and the word count than the 'tabloid' and 'mid-market' newspapers. These findings are consistent with that of O'Neill and Mulready (2015) and Packer *et al.* (2015). Moreover, the results for word count are consistent with the historical differences between the newspapers in regard to word counts: 'qualities' have longer articles than 'mid-markets' which in turn have longer articles than the 'tabloids', due to the focus on longer reading articles compared to the short reads of the other newspaper types

(Tunstall, 1996). Additionally, the 'qualities' having the most coverage on women racing drivers may be in part due to the target audiences of the newspapers (see Table 1), as they are aimed at more affluent readers (Tunstall, 1996), who are more likely to be involved in motorsport as the high cost of participation is less of a barrier for them. However, further investigation is required to understand if this is the case for motorsport reporting as a whole or just the case for women racing drivers.

Although previous research has found 'tabloid' newspapers to provide lower proportions of coverage in comparison to 'mid-markets', this research found that a tabloid was among those providing the highest coverage. *The Sun* and *Sun on Sunday* had the highest proportion of articles about women racing drivers in 2020. This was an unexpected finding as 'tabloid' newspapers have previously been found to have a lower proportion of articles about sportswomen than 'quality' and 'mid-market' newspapers (Packer *et al.*, 2015; O'Neill and Mulready, 2015). Furthermore, *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* had the lowest female readership percentage out of the six newspapers at just 43.6%, so this finding challenges the assumption that men are not interested in reading about sportswomen (Bruce, 2016). However, it could also suggest that *The Sun* and *The Sun on Sunday* are more focused on increasing their female readership and/or the commercial potential of this untapped market. Future research is warranted to understand the nature of the change, and whether it is across all sportswomen coverage in this newspaper group.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The overall aim of this chapter was to provide a quantitative backdrop to the qualitative chapters that follow and to gain quantitative insights into how British newspapers have represented women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020. This chapter has examined where women racing drivers were competing during the data sample period, which provided context for the position of women in the sport throughout the investigation. Overall, there were four main findings. Firstly, the review of women racing drivers in the top racing series highlighted the gender inequality that exists in the top echelons of motorsport. Moreover, it highlighted the inconsistencies in the participation of women in motorsport as there were very few women racing consistently across the series. Secondly, the analysis showed that

F1 was the most covered series in British newspaper articles about women racing drivers, despite women not racing in the series. Thirdly, the data showed a possible shift in how women racing drivers are reported on with both an increase in overall coverage and an increasing focus more on their performance as opposed to focus on their personal lives. Finally, the analysis in this chapter showed that women racing drivers are marginalised in the coverage compared to men, and that women racing drivers are somewhat invisible in British newspapers.

This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of how women racing drivers are represented in British newspapers and adds to the limited research on motorsport. Furthermore, this research has found similarities between the representations of women racing drivers and the corpus of research on sportswomen in general. The following chapters will now focus on the thematic analysis of the articles, as it is not only important to understand the quantity and features of coverage, but how women racing drivers are described within the articles, which is just as important.

## Chapter 5. The Boys' Club: The *othering* of women racing drivers through differential treatment and narratives.

### 5.1. Introduction

WITH its roaring engines, scantily clad pit girls and champagne-fuelled lifestyle, motorsport is still very much a man's world.

(*Daily Express*, June 23, 2014)

The previous chapter looked at the *volume* of coverage, showing how little women racing drivers received in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020 and how it was distributed across and within the newspapers. This chapter focuses on the *nature* of the coverage, exploring how the women racing drivers were reported on in the newspapers through qualitative analysis. Specifically, this chapter examines the discursive narratives that were prevalent in the articles about women racing drivers. This chapter draws on the practices that sports media academics had previously identified (see Chapter 2) to understand how the media reported on women racing drivers and how their reporting compares to that of sportswomen in other sports. Additionally, the sample of articles about men racing drivers was analysed using the codes identified in the reporting of women racing drivers to determine similarities and differences in the media's reporting of motorsport, as the area has been under-researched and norms in motorsport reporting are relatively unknown.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first interrogates the discursive journalistic practices that the media has used to (re)enforce the gender hierarchy of motorsport and how newspapers have associated the term 'racing drivers' with men, thus presenting women as outside of this norm, and therefore highlighting their difference. The second section examines the *othering* of women racing drivers through the ways in which British newspapers have positioned them as outsiders and *others* in the sport, and how this was reinforced through the discursive journalistic practice of non-task related reporting. Throughout this chapter, the findings of the media analysis will be combined with findings from the interviews with journalists and racing drivers to provide insights and context. Moreover, it is important to highlight that the following sections outline the main discursive themes,

and unless stated otherwise, the quotes and extracts presented are representative of the dataset.

## **5.2. *Racing drivers are men: The gender-marking of racing drivers.***

Unsurprisingly, the most common way women racing drivers were *othered* in the reporting was through the use of asymmetrical gender-marking, a gendered discursive journalistic practice repeatedly seen in the reporting of sportswomen (see Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Gender-marking was observed across all the newspapers throughout the data collection period and occurred in the articles in various ways, with two being most prominent. Firstly, gender-marking occurred through the use of a gender prefix to describe the women racing driver(s); see Table 15 for examples of how British newspapers have gender-marked women racing drivers, highlighting their need to identify them by their sex or gender. The most prevalent prefix was 'female'; present in 109 of the 479 articles. Alternatively, the prefix 'woman/women' was used to describe the drivers; this occurred in 52 articles. The use of gender prefixes primarily concerned the reporting of women, as male racing drivers were rarely gender-marked; this was evident when examining the articles from both data sets. This highlights the differential treatment between women and men in the reporting through the use of non-parallel language which positions women as *others* to their male peers. Additionally, this finding adds to the recent research of Biscomb and Matheson (2019), which suggested that within British newspapers, the use of gendered prefixes for sportswomen was an enduring feature of reporting rather than being a 'waning' practice, as suggested by Bruce (2016).

Secondly, gender-marking was evident in the way journalists would comment (often subtly) on the gender or sex of the drivers within the body of the article. In just over two-thirds of the corpus of articles about women racing drivers, their gender or sex was explicitly mentioned in the article's main body or the headline, i.e., 'female', 'woman' or 'girl'. This was greater than the evidence of gender-marking that Bell and Coche (2022) found examining coverage of football's Women's World Cup, a sport that is inherently gender-marked due to its sex segregation, which makes this finding even more significant. Moreover, this was considerably different when examining

the dataset collected for male racing drivers, as less than ten percent of these articles mentioned the men's sex or gender. By gender-marking in this manner, journalists remind the reader that the driver is a woman or female and so implies that women are something of a novelty and outside of the norms of the sport. This suggests that women are *others* in motorsport due to their gender and reinforces its gender hierarchy.

**Table 15.** Examples of gender-marking using the prefix female/woman in articles and headlines.

| Example  | Newspaper and date                          |
|--|---|
| <b>Main body</b>   |   |
| 'Danica Patrick was the world's most famous female racing driver'  | <i>The Sunday Times</i> (February 24, 2013) |
| 'the first female driver in 25 years to qualify for the sport's biggest race'  | <i>Daily Mirror</i> (September 14, 2019)    |
| 'Pippa, Britain's most successful female driver'   | <i>Mail on Sunday</i> (October 7, 2012)     |
| 'A WOMAN racing driver was seriously injured yesterday as she tested a car ahead of this weekend's British Grand Prix'   | <i>Daily Express</i> (July 4, 2012)         |
| <b>Headlines</b>   |   |
| 'WOMAN RACE CAR ACE KILLED; Hubby sees horror crash'   | <i>The Sun</i> (April 30, 2012)             |
| 'Mann's world a potent mix of dynamism, courage, and a begging bowl; Britain's female IndyCar racer tells how she has overcome injury and tragedy but needs cash to pursue her quest. Kevin Eason listens' | <i>The Times</i> (December 28, 2011)        |
| 'FORMULA ONE'S FIRST WOMAN DRIVER FOR 43 YEARS?'   | <i>Mail on Sunday</i> (July 7, 2019)        |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

The newspapers' tendency to use gender prefixes to describe women racing drivers did not reflect how the women racing drivers identified themselves; none of them used a gender prefix when asked to describe their role in the sport. They identified as either "racing drivers" or "rally drivers". Racing Driver A pointed out that gender-

marking was not something that occurred with men, and she felt that the way women in the sport were reported was “sort of natural”, adding:

It [gender-marking] is just a standard thing. You kind of get pigeonholed in that respect because, yes, females are out of the ordinary to get into motorsport and to accentuate who you are and what you do, that’s how they identify it [by using gender-marking] ... Just because you’re doing a male-dominated sport, it doesn’t mean that you [media] have to make such a prominent aspect out of it. You put your helmet on, and you are no different to anyone else.

What is more it appears that women are not asked about their preference in how they would like to be reported, as Racing Driver A added “I’ve never been asked; I have always had it”. In the same vein, Racing Driver B wished gender-marking did not happen:

I wish it could just be like the same as the rest [men] because it singles me out as being a female driver and putting emphasis on the fact that I am different from the rest, even though I am a driver like everyone else.

This notion of being “a driver like everyone else” (Racing Driver B) is reflective of the recent study by Kochanek *et al.* (2021, p. 7) which found many women racing drivers adopted a “just a driver mentality”, as seen in this research, as a way to empower themselves within the motorsport field. However, Kochanek *et al.* (2021) cautioned that although such mentalities may empower women racing drivers, they may also reinforce the marginalisation of women in the sport, as they do not confront the issues of sexism they encounter. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of *illusio*, as the women racing drivers have “consciously and unconsciously come to embody the conditions of their own domination” (Brown, 2006, p. 170). This was echoed in Racing Driver F’s interview as she added, sometime after discussing gender-marking, that she felt the practice was “quite sexist really”, something she had not previously considered. During the interviews, some drivers expressed that they had previously described themselves as female drivers. Racing Driver C explained that previously she had used a gender prefix “I would just say it subconsciously because there were so few women out there, and I would have to repeatedly explain my role at events as it was automatically assumed I was not the driver”. Moreover, she went on to explain that over time and meeting more women in the sport she was influenced by their “very strong opinions” that women in the sport do not need gender prefixes for their roles adding that:



I don't think there is a need to point out that you're a female. The fact you're being written about, the reader should quickly pick up that you're female. It could be a turn off if the starting words are female rally/racing driver. I think for me now, we should just drop the female part.

(Racing Driver C)

The majority of the women interviewed echoed this sentiment and hoped that gender prefixes would not be used in the future as women in the sport would become normalised. Bourdieu's (2005, p. 49) consideration that "people *en porte-à-faux*, misfits, who are put into question by the structures (operating through the positions) are able to challenge the structure, sometimes to the point of remaking it.", suggests that such a change in the use of gender prefixes is possible.

The choice to asymmetrically gender-mark racing drivers in newspaper reporting could be assumed without further investigation as a deliberate act by the media to *other* women racing drivers. However, through the interviews with journalists, it became apparent that the use of gender-marking was more complex than first assumed. Several journalists suggested that using a gender-marker may be required to provide clarity to the reader. Journalist A suggested that this may be due to an editorial team decision as "there is a clarification point and sometimes it might be that they feel that it isn't clear". Expanding on the need for clarity for the reader, Journalist B pointed out that without a photograph of the racing driver alongside a newspaper article, the reader would not know that the driver was a woman without gender-marking:

Certainly, for someone like Jamie [Chadwick], because obviously her name, you know, if you haven't got a picture, you wouldn't know if Jamie is a boy or girl. So, you might say, 'Jamie Chadwick is hoping to be the first female in...' or 'female Formula One driver' or something like that...Additionally, I think that, you know, putting her sex in is part of the story.

The need for clarity on a female racing driver's gender is an interesting point as it somewhat suggests the journalists assume there is a lack of awareness or understanding of the sport in both the newspaper's editorial teams and their readership. It also raises the question of whether readers need to know the gender of racing drivers. Several racing drivers also gave this need for clarity as justification for why the media would gender-mark women rather than men. For example, Racing Driver G said, "they wouldn't know I am a girl; I could be a bloke". The women racing drivers' need to justify gender-marking seems reflective of what Bourdieu (2001, p.

217) describes as the reproduction of symbolic domination where the dominated “help to reproduce the conditions of oppression”. Moreover, women racing drivers have accepted such treatment in the media as “the natural order of things” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 167). However, Racing Driver D raised the issue of being misgendered in an article. She explained that the incident as “the most frustrating thing” as she had a successful performance, and as she was not gender-marked by the reporter as a female driver, the editorial team assumed that she was male and corrected the copy from her to *his*. This misgendering highlights the assumption that racing drivers are men and provides some justification for gender-marking as a way to avoid potential misrecognition and denying an individual’s identity.

In addition to the need for clarity to justify the use of gender-marking, within the interviews the women racing drivers suggested the practice could help to promote role models and awareness of women in the sport. For several women, this created an internal conflict as they did not agree with the practice but also saw a need for it. For example, Racing Driver G felt that “it’s still important to identify like that until people’s awareness [of women in the sport] increases”. Alternatively, Racing Driver B explained, “I get why we do [gender mark]; we’re trying to encourage another generation of females into a sport that is still highly overlooked”, a viewpoint that several other racing drivers echoed. This justification of gender-marking to highlight that women are in motorsport and can be role models, is reflective of the motivations for elite athletes to conduct media interviews. Kovacs and Doczi (2020, p. 1142) found that “to show an example” was the third most common motivation for elite athletes to give interviews. While many of the women racing drivers felt that gender-marking can help to provide role models in the sport, this justification could simultaneously be seen as an indication that they are misrecognising the symbolic violence that is enacted upon them. It could be argued that women racing drivers are complicit in the reproduction of symbolic violence by viewing the practice as beneficial to the future of women in the sport, rather than acknowledging that gender-marking has “worked to reinscribe” their oppression (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002, p. 25).

Probing the causation for gender-marking further, the journalists were unaware of any specific guidance about sportswomen in terms of gender-marking in their

publications' style guide<sup>31</sup>. A couple of journalists admitted that they had not read their style guide in a long time, so they were unsure if there was any guidance, although they had never been told otherwise by their editors. The relative lack of guidance in style guides is evidenced in the most recent edition of *The Guardian and The Observer's Style Guide* (Guardian News & Media Limited, 2021), where, although there was no specific guidance for sport within *gender issues*, it is stated, "If you need to use an adjective, it is female and not 'woman' in such phrases as female bishops, female MPs, female president.". Notably absent was an example of when to use 'male' or 'man'. Bien-Aimé (2016) suggested that the 2012 *Associated Press's Stylebook's* reinforced sports media's doxa, where sportsmen are privileged and legitimized as the norm. Thus, the apparent lack of guidance in style guides is one possible cause of the ongoing use of asymmetrical gender-marking. It is concerning that the interviews highlighted that not all the journalists were engaged with their style guides. Were this to be the case across the greater community of journalists and changes designed to initiate more equitable coverage were actioned by newspapers but not effectively communicated to their editorial and writing teams, or read by journalists, it would be a significant barrier to the doxa evolving.

The discussions with the journalists also highlighted the unconscious and embedded nature of asymmetrical gender-marking that is present in the journalistic coverage of motorsport. Journalist B discussed that gender-marking was a part of his everyday writing style. Moreover, during the discussion, he reflected that the reasoning for this was more of an unconscious practice as he had not considered asymmetrical gender-marking before: "It's interesting. I never really thought of it. I hadn't even thought about it if I'm honest". The unconscious nature of gender-marking that Journalist B articulated highlights how the somatization<sup>32</sup> of the gender power relations in sports journalism has been embodied into the journalist's habitus to enact the doxa of the field (sports journalism in this case) at an unconscious level

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<sup>31</sup> Style guides are produced to highlight linguistic, grammatical, and technical conventions and trends that help to inform the appropriate discursive journalistic practices for a publication or association to which a journalist may belong. A style guide may be in a printed form (such as Associated Press, 2022) or online (such as Guardian News & Media Limited, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Brown (2006, p. 170) explains that somatization "concerns the articulation of social, cultural, and historical processes that, through practice, embed symbolic oppositions into and onto the body. It is also concerned with, and the concomitant construction of, differentially valued gendered schemes of perception that are normatively generated from these". As such the dominant habitus is embodied and seen as legitimate, with social practices and positions stem from these "naturalised qualities" (Brown, 2006, p. 170).

(Brown, 2006). This could be further compounded by the journalist's privileged position of being male. Thus, this finding suggests that some of those producing articles that reproduce motorsport's gendered hierarchy, through asymmetrically gender-marking racing drivers, are doing so unconsciously. Ultimately, they are reflecting the orthodoxy of the field, which perpetuates the ideologies of the patriarchy (Bruce, 2016).

Despite the widespread use of gender-marking in British newspapers' reporting of women racing drivers, it is essential to note that the practice was not always used. Within the sample there were occasions when women racing drivers were reported in a manner similar to that used to report male racing drivers, i.e., they were not gender-marked or their gender was only implicitly mentioned or referred to (pronouns). This practice of not gender-marking racing drivers is reflective of that seen in the reporting of equestrian riders in British newspapers (Dashper, 2018). The typical discursive journalistic practices observed in the articles about male racing drivers highlighted that men were often referred to in terms of their team, achievements, level, or series they raced in, or nationality<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, this non-gender-marked reporting of women racing drivers was not just evident in most recent coverage as there was evidence (albeit less frequent) of this in earlier reporting. These pre-2015 occasions when women racing drivers were not gender-marked tended to be in articles where there had been a significant accident or incident in a race (caused by any gender of racing driver). This could be partly due to the established embodiment of masculinity in the way the death of racing drivers has been reported on by the media, where the masculine qualities of the racing drivers (including bravado attitude to death, risk-taking, egotism, perfectionism and heroism) have been brought to the forefront of reporting (see Demers, 2018). This could have resulted in the observed absence of gendered discursive journalistic reporting practices of the death of a woman racing driver. When women racing drivers are not gender-marked, it suggests to the reader that as they are treated in the same manner as men racing drivers and as such are framed as equals.

Additionally, there was evidence, albeit limited, of *both* men and women being gender-marked in some articles. For example, symmetrical gender-marking

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<sup>33</sup> The reporting on the nationality of women racing drivers was also noted, this will be further explored in Chapter 7.

appeared in the discussion of the then new racing series Extreme E, which is grounded in the ethos of 50:50 mixed participation. Although motorsport has always allowed for mixed participation, this is the first regulated international mixed entry series in the sport. This follows a trend that has recently developed, where many sports which have been traditionally sex-segregated have had a mixed-gender format included in international events<sup>34</sup>. Although this was evident in only a small proportion of articles, it is significant, as equal treatment through gender-marking both sexes has not previously been seen. Furthermore, the examples of equal gender-marking occurred near the end of the sample period (2018 onwards). One possible reason for this change could be the marketing of Extreme E influencing the language being used by journalists. Alternatively, it could suggest a more conscious effort among journalists to be equal in their reporting and a shift in their attitudes towards sportswomen.

This consciousness of gender-marking in reporting on sportswomen was evident in the interviews as three-quarters of the journalists said that they tried to avoid gender-marking racing drivers within their writing. This reflects the findings of Schmidt (2018), as he suggested that there appeared to be positive signs of changes in the cultural attitudes of journalists towards fairer coverage of sportswomen. The reasoning for why the interviewed journalists did not gender-mark varied; for some, it was a conscious choice. For example, Journalist D explained, "From my perspective, I have interviewed many female racers before, and I can hand on my heart say that I have treated them no differently from male racing drivers, and that is a conscious decision." Likewise, Journalist A stated, "I'm very conscious of this [gender-marking] in my work", as she understood the negative connotations associated with asymmetrical gender-marking. What is more, she articulated that "it is important that we must do it the other way round as well", and as a result, she practised symmetrical gender-marking. Alternatively, for Journalist E, he found the practice of gender-marking perplexing. For him, when writing about women racing drivers it was an unconscious decision to not gender-mark them:

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<sup>34</sup> There has been an increase in mixed events at an international stage. For example, the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games hosted 18 mixed-gender events in a range of sports including swimming, judo, triathlon, shooting, and athletics. There was also a range of mixed-gender events in the 2020 Paralympics Games and 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics (IOC, 2021).

I don't think it's [gender-marking] very elegant writing. Doing it sounds clunky. And I mean it's obviously a shame 'cause it's reflective of where we are in society that people feel the need to say, 'female driver' and would be nice if it didn't really matter. But I don't think about it. I don't think one needs to. There is no need for that personally speaking, there is no need for it [gender-marking], and I'm not sure why it would be there.

(Journalist E)

However, at some point, Journalist E made a conscious decision to write this way, as, like the other journalists, his 'choice' to not gender-mark women is counter to the enduring doxa of the media (Bien-Aimé, 2016). This strong desire of several of the interviewed journalists to not gender-mark women racing drivers was somewhat at odds with the findings of the prevalence within the examined articles in this study. One possible reason for this could be that the journalists who were willing to be interviewed for this study were more aware of inequalities in reporting of sportswomen and were passionate about women in sport. Alternatively, their choice to not gender-mark may have been influenced by the doxa of the publications that they were writing for. It is also important to note that the prevalence of gender-marking in the newspaper articles may not reflect the choice of the journalist, as (sub)editors may change the submitted copy adding gender-marking, as seen in the earlier example where Racing Driver D was mis-gendered.

This research has highlighted that there is an underlying assumption that racing drivers are men and seen as the norm within the sport. This reinforces the association between motorsport and men, that has been identified in the limited previous research and the enduring positioning of women in motorsport as 'inferior' (Sloop, 2005; Pflugfelder, 2009; Matthews and Pike, 2016). However, there are nuances and complexities for the occurrence of gender-marking women racing drivers which were raised by both women racing drivers and journalists, which reinforces the challenges of sex-integration in sport in a society where sex-segregation is the norm.

### **5.3. Motorsport as neutral?**

During the analysis of the newspaper articles and throughout the interviews, a gendered complexity emerged regarding how racing series and titles were reported within the sampled articles. Although this research found a prevalence of gender-marking of racing drivers, on the whole, the naming of racing series lacked gender-marking, i.e. FIA Formula One Championship, Formula E and NTT IndyCar Series. This naming practice reflects the official gender neutrality of the series and echoes similar sex-integrated sports' championships and international events, such as the Longines Global Champions Tour in show jumping (Global Champions GCL BV, 2022) and the World Snooker Tour (WST, 2022). In some way, this lack of gender-marking evident in most motorsport series could be viewed as progressive in the greater sporting context as the majority of sports that women participate in are gender-marked (Daddario, 2021), such as the Women's Football World Cup.

However, although there are no motor racing series that are exclusive to men, there are a handful that are exclusive to women (such as WSeries, Formula Woman, and *Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles du Maroc*) and unsurprisingly these series tended to be gender-marked in the newspapers. For instance, in the articles examined, the WSeries was gender-marked rather than identified solely as WSeries. The WSeries was often referred to as an "all-female" or "female only" series. Likewise, the *Rallye Aïcha des Gazelles du Maroc* was also highlighted by its status as a race only for women. The way these series are reported in British newspapers reflects the gender-marking patterns seen in previous research examining sex-segregated sports, where women's sport is often gender-marked and men's is not (Daddario, 2021). The inclusion of these women-only sex-segregated series in motorsport and the subsequent gender-marking of these series, to a certain extent, creates the implication that non-gender-marked series are for men as that is the norm in the majority of sports. Hence, as these racing series have separated from the sport's inherent position of supposed gender neutrality and have created a gendered space and may have been marketed as 'female' or 'women-only' to the press, the consequences of such gender-marking must be considered. Motorsport is not the only sex-integrated sport where this segregation has occurred; in snooker, a women-only tour exists alongside the professional tour (open to both genders)

(World Women's Snooker, 2022). Moreover, this practice raises questions as to why races exclusively for women are required in a sport that is open to all, but this is beyond the scope of this current study.

Additionally, it is worth noting that when a driver wins a motorsport series, they gain the overall title as the champion regardless of gender. However, in some series or races, they award a 'female champion' title for the highest placed female driver and in rallying this can include co-drivers. For example, the ERC Ladies Champion title (WRC Promoter GmbH, 2019) was mentioned in several articles as it had been awarded to the driver being discussed (i.e. Catie Munnings). This practice could be seen as a way to highlight or spotlight women participating in the sport. Alternatively, awarding a woman a title for being the best woman in the race or championship could be viewed as somewhat tokenistic and condescending when they may be the only woman competing. It could be argued that this practice further undermines women racing driver's legitimacy in the sport. Moreover, reporting on women in this way further compounds the *othering* of women in the sport by suggesting that they are inferior to men.

During the interviews with journalists, while discussing the gender-marking of racing series and titles, Journalist A pointed out the "gender flagging" complexity that the sport has created for journalists. She explained that:

I think particularly where the gender flagging gets complicated is when you flag a championship as a women's race or a women's championship when you would not do so for the men. So, for example, I find the European Women's Champion quite tricky because you simply wouldn't say that 'X' male driver was the European Men's Champion. But then again, that also is partly a clarification point because they [women] can race in, and they predominantly do race in non-gendered races with men. So, it is a very different thing if they become European Champion to the European Women's Champion. So yeah, I don't think we have the answer to that yet, but I think motorsport is a very unique case when it comes to labelling or flagging gender.

(Journalist A)

The example above highlights the challenges for journalists when they write about a driver who has won a gendered championship title (e.g. Women's European Rally Champion) within a gender-neutral championship series (e.g. European Rally Championship). It forces the journalist to gender-mark the women when they may



not otherwise have done so. Furthermore, several of the interviewed racing drivers also expressed frustration that women were rewarded women's titles in mixed competitions. For example, Racing Driver C said that although she could see why clubs have these awards to encourage women in the sport, she felt that "It doesn't encourage women. You're already doing it", adding that at "some point women need to get together and have a conversation about it and say that none of us really like it". The frustration expressed by the women racing drivers combined with how the existence of such titles adds to the *othering* of women racing drivers raises questions about the usefulness of such practices in motorsport.

It was also noted during the interviews with journalists that the WSeries was promoted as an all-female and women's series, and as such, both Journalist B and Journalist C suggested that they would refer to the WSeries as a women-only series as that is how it had been sold and marketed. As previously mentioned, the WSeries was in its infancy during the data collection period. It was only launched in 2019 and due to Covid-19 it was cancelled for the 2020 season and, as such, was relatively unknown in the international media and racing field. However, one of the racing drivers suggested that as it is called the WSeries, the name makes it obvious enough to the readers that it is a racing series for women and therefore it does not need to be gender-marked. It will be interesting to review in the future whether the gender-marking continues or whether the series becomes known only as the WSeries as it becomes established in the motorsport field.

### **5.3.1. *Setting F1 as the motorsport standard (a space with no women)***

Throughout the media analysis and interviews, it was apparent that the FIA Formula One World Championship (F1) was the prevailing focus of motorsport coverage in newspapers. As previously discussed in Chapter 4, 51% of articles about women racing drivers focused on F1. The sample of articles about male racing drivers was also predominately focused on F1. Explaining why F1 dominates coverage, Journalist E stated that it was due to the "commercial diktat" within the newspapers, with F1 always being prioritised as "A Lewis Hamilton race report might get a quarter of a million in unique users. It's off the scale, bigger than any other form of motorsport, such as a Le Mans race report may only get 50-60,000". He added that as a result "Formula One is the priority and that we will always have space in the

paper for it". Reflecting on the increasing popularity of F1 in the UK, Journalist C felt that it might help to increase future coverage of motorsport as a whole (and for women racing drivers):

You can't blame the newspapers focusing on F1, especially with the big fight for the championship [Hamilton vs Verstappen in 2020]. Ultimately it may help gain motorsport more overall coverage, as perhaps a sports editor will say 'we'll stick in a couple of pages on motorsport', and then that leads to 'let's do a story on the all-female championship'.

Likewise, Journalist B added that he had seen a "huge appetite" for F1 recently and that "when you're walking down the street and overhear conversations [about F1] anywhere it's really good". Hence, in line with the sports media complex (Jhally, 1984) newspapers' focus on the form of motorsport that will sell the most newspapers, and currently, this is F1 in the UK.

However, this dominance of F1 in newspaper coverage is problematic for coverage of women racing drivers. Although women can race in the series, the last woman to qualify to race in the championship was Leila Lombardi in 1976 (Motorsport Week, 2021). Thus, as F1 coverage is sometimes the only coverage of motor racing that a reader may see in a newspaper, it may suggest to them that the field is devoid of women and, as such, motorsport is an exclusively male domain. Therefore, women are represented as *others* as they are outside the norms that have been represented in motorsport coverage. This notion is further examined in Chapter 6, which explores how the media represents women in the sport as extraordinary and somewhat mythical, perpetuating their *otherness* in the sport. Although motorsport is in theory not sex-segregated parallels can be drawn with how men's sex-segregated sport has been positioned and represented as the norm thereby setting the standard within that sport (e.g. football, see Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2019)). Thus, the fixation of British newspapers with F1 impacts the representation of women racing drivers as they are relatively invisible in this dominating championship.

#### **5.4. Off the racing line?**

Only 19.8% of articles about women racing drivers focused on 'performance', which was significantly different to the articles about male racing drivers, where the majority of articles focused on their racing performance. This section examines the

gendered narratives and practices that were evident in the reporting of women racing drivers, which could be seen to marginalise and trivialise their involvement and position in the sport.

#### **5.4.1. Questioning the involvement of women racing drivers in the sport**

It was evident in the analysis that British newspapers inadvertently *othered* women racing drivers in their coverage between 2010 and 2020 by including discussions that questioned the involvement of women in the sport and as such represented women racing drivers as outside of the norm. These discussions which questioned the involvement of women in the sport focused on the ability of women to race against men. This questioning was often brought to the forefront of the newspaper coverage through discussions centred on women racing drivers' physical and or mental ability, the perceived barriers to their participation, or by discussing the risks of the sport for a woman. This was not a narrative that was present in articles about male racing drivers. It is important to note that on the whole articles were framed in a manner that supported and defended women racing drivers' involvement in the sport, but they often included critical views towards women racing drivers from men within motorsport. By discussing the involvement of women in the sport and providing views that suggested that they should not be racing against men, it questioned their legitimacy in the sport. Previous research has articulated that this type of questioning of women's involvement in a sport has further *othered* and trivialised sportswomen by reinforcing male participation as the norm (Kemble, 2020).

The lack of women racing drivers in motorsport was frequently discussed in the articles with much speculation and debate as to why this was the case. Firstly, there were numerous examples in the sample, including whole articles, which discussed whether women racing drivers were physically or mentally capable of racing alongside men at the top levels of the sport (most frequently in F1). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, there have been long-standing beliefs that physical differences between the sexes place women at a disadvantage to men in sport (Theberge, 2000). Moreover, academics such as Sloop (2005) and Pflugfelder (2009) have reiterated that despite the potential of the technology of race cars to neutralise the field, the gendered discourses surrounding motorsport have created

assumptions that women racers have an inferior ability to race the cars compared to men. What is more, motorsport is seen as a space where masculine traits are celebrated (Kochanek *et al.*, 2021).

Another way women racing drivers were framed as *others* through questioning their involvement in the sport was when newspapers reported on sexist comments made by prominent men within motorsport. For the most part, the way the articles were framed suggested that journalists supported or defended the women racing drivers being able to race against the men. However, including and repeating these sexist comments in articles about women racing drivers after the event reminds readers of the 'controversy' of women in the field. For example, Bernie Ecclestone said, "I don't know whether a woman would physically be able to drive an F1 car quickly, and they wouldn't be taken seriously" (quoted in *The Guardian*, April 19, 2016). Likewise, Sir Sterling Moss<sup>35</sup> stated his views on women racing in F1, saying:

I don't know if they've got the mental aptitude to race hard, wheel-to-wheel. The trouble is, it's tiring. We've got some very robust ladies, but, when your life is at risk, I think the strain of that in a competitive situation will tell. The mental stress I think would be pretty difficult for a lady to deal with in a practical fashion. I just don't think they have the aptitude to win a Formula One race.

(Sir Sterling Moss quoted in *Daily Mirror*, April 16, 2013)

These examples illustrate symbolic violence towards women racing drivers from within the sport rather than from the newspapers. The examples highlight how women in the sport are seen to destabilise the naturalised legitimacy of the male habitus by some male racing drivers and, as such, are subjected to stigma which draws "on a plethora of naturalized 'biological' differences to make the case" (Brown, 2006, p. 178). Despite this, within the articles, there was evidence of "lazy reporting techniques" (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019, p. 269) as there was a tendency for quotes from the women racing drivers to be used to argue the point rather than presenting the journalists' words calling out the sexism. It could also be argued that including the quotes from women racing drivers gives the women racing drivers a voice in what is otherwise a mainly male space. However, as a result of the focus given to these arguments that question the involvement of women in the sport

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<sup>35</sup> Sir Stirling Moss was a leading British F1 Driver who raced in the series between 1951 and 1961 (Motor Sport Magazine, 2023).

combined with how the articles were written, these representations of women racing drivers reinforced the *otherness* of the women in the field and shifted focus away from their achievements.

In addition to the articles focusing solely on the involvement of women in the sport, women's physical and mental ability to race was also commented on prior to or after discussion of their racing performance. For example, an article in the *Mail on Sunday* (July 7, 2018) focused on the signing of Jamie Chadwick to the Williams F1 team and her success in the current WSeries. However, halfway through the article, the focus shifted away from her performance to focus on the lack of women in F1 and her involvement as a woman in the sport and even questioned her physical capabilities to race, again using her words to defend her position:

For Chadwick, it is simply about numbers. "The physicality of the cars is pretty high but I don't think it's the deciding factor as to why women haven't made it in motorsport," she said. "We can definitely get strong enough to drive those cars. The G-forces are high but the steering is not too heavy so it's definitely possible you've just got to train a little bit harder to overcome it so I don't think that's the reason".

(*Mail on Sunday*, July 7, 2018)

Additionally, there were numerous examples of subtle manifestations of questioning the ability of women racing drivers in the articles where the readers' focus was directed to the physical attributes and training routines of the women racing drivers that would place them on a par with men. One way this occurred in the articles was through a focus on the driver's fitness routine (see Table 16 for examples). Unlike the findings of Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2019), the newspapers in this study did not position the women as physically incapable of the male standard; rather they represent the women as capable. What is more, it was apparent that rather than reinforcing feminine physical attributes that have been traditionally associated with sportswomen (Bruce, 2016) and seen in previous research on women racing drivers (see Cuneen *et al.*, 2007; Ross, Ridinger and Cuneen, 2009; Neilson, 2013; Matthews and Pike, 2016; Tolvhed, 2017), this study found that more often women in motorsport were compared to men in relation to their physical attributes. The physical attributes that were discussed were traditionally associated with masculinity, such as physical strength; although there were rare occasions when their femininity was also discussed. This was the evident in the words of the

journalists and quoted women racing drivers in the newspaper articles. This could be partly due to motorsport being sex-integrated and if newspapers reinforced feminine traits of the women racing drivers, it could be seen to feminise or emasculate male racing drivers. However, the fact that this narrative was reproduced by the women racing drivers themselves suggests that it goes beyond just protecting the male ego. Rather it is more likely an attempt to counter the negative narratives and attitudes surrounding women’s physical abilities. This finding is contrary to previous research, which has suggested that women in masculine sports tend to portray themselves in a more feminised manner to appear less masculine (Fink, Kane and LaVoi, 2014; Godoy-Pressland, 2016).

**Table 16.** Examples of training descriptions of women racing drivers.

| <i>Example</i>   | <i>Newspaper and date</i>            |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| ‘I have to do circuit training and Pilates every day to keep my arms, neck and core strong enough to cope with the force.’ | <i>The Sun (May 12, 2013)</i>        |
| ‘You need serious strength to drive and in order to cope Susie has a vigorous training regime.’                            | <i>Daily Express (June 23, 2014)</i> |
| ‘It’s also really physical, so I spend a lot of time in the gym getting my fitness up.’                                    | <i>The Sun (January 20, 2019)</i>    |
| ‘Wolff’s gruelling training regime silences any grumblings that she has it easier being a woman.’                          | <i>The Times (November 29, 2014)</i> |

*Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from Lexis Nexis Academic.*

Women racing drivers celebrating their masculine qualities could be seen as a way in which they highlight or gain capital within the field and legitimise their involvement in the sport. Kochanek *et al.* (2021) argued that American women racing drivers mute their femininity to be taken more seriously in the sport. Likewise, Fink, Kane and LaVoi (2014) found that the majority of female athletes in their study wanted be represented in relation to their athletic competence to increase their legitimacy in sport. However, the need to discuss the training and physical capabilities of the women racing drivers to justify their sporting capital rather serves to reinforce the notion that, despite their ‘hard work’, they are not the norm within the sport and thus highlights their difference. Although the comparison of sportswomen to sportsmen may be intended to complement the former, as Bruce outlines, “Instead, researchers

have argued this practice reinforces the superiority of male athletes and reifies men's sport as the norm against which women's sport is judged, usually as inferior" (2016, p. 365).

Another way the women's involvement in the sport was questioned was by discussing the contentious decision to propose the (re)introduction of sex-segregation in the sport through competitions such as the WSeries. Approximately 12% of the articles about women racing drivers covered the controversy surrounding sex-segregation. Although not all the coverage was positive, the greatest emphasis of the narratives surrounding sex-segregation in the sport was celebrating the fact there were indeed women in the sport. The articles offered a balance in opinions for and against such series from various motorsport experts, including women racing drivers. However, there were several occasions where the journalists positioned the argument for such series from the perspectives of established and distinguished men in the field, especially from F1, which could be viewed "as a way of protecting sport as a male preserve", arguing that women should be separated as they are deemed inferior to their male peers (Leflay and Biscomb, 2021, p. 1643). As well as highlighting perceived barriers for women to compete at the top levels of the sport, such as funding, lack of early socialisation into the sport and lack of female role models, several articles presented women racing drivers as a group being divided. This was partly due to articles creating an 'us vs them' narrative using the voices of several high-profile women racing drivers who opposed the series and others who (cautiously) supported the sex-segregation. The women who opposed the WSeries were described in the articles with language that framed them as unreasonable and hysterical, for example the "most out-spoken critic" (*Daily Mail*, October 11, 2018) and a "tad overdramatic" (*The Observer*, October 14, 2018). Furthermore, readers were reminded that "much of the criticism came from female racing drivers" (*The Times*, May 4, 2019), presenting these women as against the 'progression' of women in the sport. As such, this way of questioning the involvement of women in the sport by the media, although it was mostly positive, reinforced and positioned to readers that in motorsport women are inferior as they need a separate series for their gender to be able to progress in the motorsport world, rather than within the current parameters of the sport.

During the interviews with the women racing drivers the most frequently asked questions that they recalled being asked were in relation to their involvement in the sport as a woman, reflecting the findings of the media analysis. The most frequently asked question mentioned by the women racing drivers was ‘how does it feel to be a female in the sport?’. Many of the women also recalled being asked, ‘why do you think there aren’t more women in the sport?’. Additionally, many of the women articulated that they felt interviewers tended to focus on their gender rather than their racing. Racing Driver B explained that she resented this line of questioning, saying:

‘How do you feel to be a female in motorsport?’ I hate that question. I am a person in the sport. I choose to do this sport because I enjoy driving. But you can’t say this kind of stuff. I’ve never focused on the fact I was a woman in motorsport; it’s the only sport out there where you can still compete on a level playing field in exactly the same car.

Although the other racing drivers interviewed did not explicitly say they hated being asked about being a woman in motorsport and the barriers they have experienced, they all stated that they would prefer their racing performance, aspirations, and development to be at the forefront of questioning, rather than their gender. Kane, LaVoi and Fink (2013) also reported that they found sportswomen were frustrated with how they are represented in the media. Journalist D, who stated that he treated women racers the same as men in his reporting, acknowledged the tendency of the press to question the involvement of women in the sport, pointing out that he had witnessed inappropriate questioning of women racing drivers:

I’ve been in round-table discussions where somebody not of the same persuasion has asked ridiculous questions and were very stereotypical about, you know, about it [their sex]. It’s toe-curlingly awful. Because apart from the fact these women have known they are women for a very long time, it’s stating the bleedingly obvious!

Although it may not be the intended outcome, if journalists continue to repeatedly ask women racing drivers the same questions, the coverage of women in the sport will not move beyond highlighting their *otherness*.

Despite that, the articles that were examined, which discussed the involvement of women in the sport, generally appeared to be positive about their involvement and often provided arguments in favour of the inclusion of women in motorsport, while



at the same time “artfully undermining women’s athletic accomplishments” (Fink, 2015, p. 334). The undermining of the women’s performance occurred because the debate about their ability to race alongside men often overshadowed any discussion of their actual racing performance. The questioning of the involvement of the women in the sport was often framed in the articles through discussions of perceived barriers to their participation, such as their physical and/or mental ability compared to men. Moreover, this research demonstrates that the narrative of questioning the involvement of women in motorsport appears to be an enduring feature of motorsport coverage in British newspapers. This finding adds to those of Matthews and Pike (2016, p. 1541), who found that “more recent articles continue to perpetuate traditional concerns regarding the *reasons* why women cannot and do not race in ‘a man’s world’”. As previously mentioned, their sample concluded in July 2010, and almost a decade later, this study shows that British newspapers are still having this debate.

#### **5.4.2. *What happens off the track: The personal lives of women racing drivers***

Throughout this analysis it was evident that British newspapers also reported on the personal lives of the women racing drivers. This practice aided in the *othering* of the women racing drivers and reproduced the gendered hierarchy. Previous research has highlighted that an enduring feature of the coverage given to sportswomen focuses on their personal lives at the expense of coverage of their performance, thus trivialising and marginalising their sporting achievements and serving to *other* them (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016). Chapter 4 illustrated that only a small proportion (19.8%) of all the articles about women racing drivers covered their sporting performances. Within the articles, the personal lives of the women racing drivers were often referred to with greater detail and importance than their racing performance or careers. In contrast, this narrative was rarely seen in the reporting of male racing drivers. Moreover, unlike the reporting of women racing drivers, whenever the personal lives of male racing drivers were discussed, it was positioned as secondary to their racing. This section will detail how the newspapers reported on the personal lives of the women racing drivers focusing on the two main categories that emerged, relationships and background, and as such, show how the newspapers *othered* the women drivers in the reporting.

In the interviews with the women racing drivers, many highlighted that they were rarely questioned about their on-track performances. They described that the questioning was often related to 'how did they get involved in the sport' or 'why they chose motorsport?'. For example, Racing Driver A said she was often asked, "So what did you do before [racing]? and things like that". What is more, she pointed out that this was very different to the types of questions her male peers get asked, which tended to be "intricate information" about their racing performances. She aired her frustration with this, stating "yes, we do understand, it's not gonna fricking confuse us". Many of the drivers experienced similar lines of questioning and wished they were asked more about their performances or technical aspects of their racing. Racing Driver B added that "maybe they do ask me that, but because they've asked me so many mundane questions, you don't hear them, as it is always the same." This suggests that women racing drivers would prefer to be represented in relation to their athletic competence, a point found in previous research (Fink, Kane and LaVoi, 2014).

#### **5.4.2.1. Relationships**

The inclusion and discussion of personal relationships was the most common way in which the personal lives of women racing drivers were reported across the six newspapers. The focus on the personal relationships of sportswomen has been found to be an enduring feature of British newspaper reporting (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019), and unsurprisingly was reflected in this study. The relationships of the women racing drivers discussed within the articles tended to be centred around their position as daughters, wives, or girlfriends.

The most common relationship discussed was between a woman racing driver and her parents; it was evident in approximately a quarter of the 479 articles. It is worth noting that only a very small proportion of the sample of articles about male racing drivers, referenced their parents. In the handful of occurrences in the sample of articles about male racing drivers, the references tended to be about new F1 drivers

and focused on the wealth of their parents<sup>36</sup> in funding their child's racing career or, as discussed in greater detail below, as the sons, brothers, or uncles of well-known racing drivers. For the women racing drivers, the articles tended to frame this parental relationship in terms of either the parent's supportive role to the driver or the sporting capital the parent had in the motorsport field. The supportive role of the parents to male drivers was generally not presented as a source of motivation or emotional support in the way that was apparent in the women's articles. This theme was more prevalent for women racing drivers than for men and extended beyond the beginning of their careers, which was not the case for male racing drivers in the articles examined. For example, "Her father, owner of an office cleaning company and a part-time endurance Karter, had inspired and supported her in the early days" (*The Sunday Times*, March 31, 2019). This emphasis on familial support and relationships is a narrative that inadvertently trivialises the achievements and autonomy of the women racing drivers (Godoy-Pressland, 2014b), by reducing them to their role in the family unit (Kemble, 2020), which again shifts focus away from their racing performance. This was not the case for male drivers. Furthermore, in some articles, fathers of women racing drivers defended their daughters' involvement in the sport due to the risks involved in the sport, this generally occurred after a woman racing driver was involved in an accident or sustained an injury. Not only does the inclusion of such narratives highlight the perceived barriers to women participating in the sport, but it also reinforces the notion that they are *others* in the sport and reliant on their father's support or defence.

The parental relationship was most frequently emphasised in the articles by foregrounding the motorsport heritage of parents (predominantly fathers). This is a narrative that has been previously identified in the reporting of sportswomen (see Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Kemble, 2020). Table 17 illustrates several examples of how this father-and-daughter relationship was reported in newspapers. Reference to the father's motorsport legacy was often repeated in each article about the woman throughout her career, reminding the reader that they are 'the daughter of...'. There was some, albeit much less prevalent, evidence of this in the reporting

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<sup>36</sup> Motorsport is unlike other sports in the fact that you can 'buy' your seat in a racing team at the top level of the sport. A racing driver who 'buys' their seat has to reach the minimum threshold of skill and experience to race in the series, i.e. have the racing experience to get the required racing licence for competing. However, they gain their seat from substantial financial backing rather than their racing performance alone.

of male racing drivers (for example Mick Schumacher, the son of Michael Schumacher or Max Verstappen, the son of Jos Verstappen) however, this practice occurred substantially less than in the reporting of women racing drivers. There are several different ways in which the narrative of father-and-daughters can be interpreted. Firstly, the framing of women racing drivers as daughters to those already in motorsport on the surface highlights to the reader their racing pedigree and could be seen as a way to engage the reader with the article by aligning them with their well-known fathers and making the story newsworthy (Bednarek and Caple, 2012). This viewpoint was corroborated in the interviews with the journalists. Thus, it is suggested that the choice to include a reference to the racing heritage of a parent, or parents, is to engage the reader. Moreover, the inclusion of parental relationships in motorsport coverage may reflect the importance given to family connections in motorsport, as found by Grootuis and Grootuis (2008) and Depken, Grootuis and Rotthoff (2018). Additionally, the narrative could be seen as a way to promote the sporting capital and habitus the racing driver holds and to provide legitimacy to the female racing driver in the sport through their parental relationship, thus justifying to the reader the woman's position in the sport. Although this practice draws some parallels with the reporting of male racing drivers, the higher prevalence within the reporting of women racing drivers could be seen as problematic. There is a risk that trying to justify the legitimacy of the driver to the reader in this manner inadvertently questions women racing drivers' ability and trivialises their involvement in the sport. By reducing the women to their family connection, the reporting undermines their legitimacy as it again removes the focus from their sporting performance (Aull and Brown, 2013). Kemble (2020) cautions that reporting such relationships of sportswomen to their fathers can be used to trivialise, stereotype and *other* these women depending on the context of the reporting. This narrative could be seen as a way in which the reporting in this study reinforces the established male standard in motorsport and thus subtly (re)establishes and (re)enforces that these women are *outsiders* in the sport, despite the intentions of journalists to engage readers with women racing drivers. Future research is warranted to examine the persistence of this practice over the coming years to see how its prevalence develops and whether it persists throughout the careers of current racing drivers as it did for Susie Wolff and Maria de Villota. Additionally, as this research only examined a two-year period for male racing

drivers, further research into the prevalence of the practice in the reporting of male racing drivers is needed.

**Table 17.** Examples of reporting father-and-daughter relationships

| <i>Example</i>  | <i>Newspaper and date</i>                  |
|---|--|
| 'She is the daughter of former F1 driver Emilio De Villota'   | <i>Daily Express (July 4, 2012)</i>        |
| 'She is the daughter of the sport's most successful driver, Frankie Wainman Jnr'  | <i>Daily Mirror (September 14, 2019)</i>   |
| 'Vanina Ickx, daughter of the celebrated Belgian Le Mans racer Jacky Ickx'  | <i>The Sunday Times (June 5, 2011)</i>     |
| 'Jorda's father, Jose Miguel, was a successful racing driver in Spain and encouraged his daughter to follow in his footsteps' | <i>The Sun on Sunday (May 3, 2015)</i>     |
| 'Eaton is the daughter of Paul Eaton, a former racing driver'   | <i>The Sunday Times (January 13, 2019)</i> |

*Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.*

In addition to the attention given in the newspapers to the relationships with family members, the romantic relationship status or partners of the women racing drivers were often referred to within the articles, in comparison it was rarely mentioned in the sampled articles about male racing drivers. This is a theme repeatedly found in previous research on sportswomen (see Bruce, 2016). Relationships were discussed within the articles about women racing drivers by the journalist referencing partners or through a quote from the driver (suggesting that the women were being questioned about their relationships). Table 18 illustrates several examples of how women racing drivers' relationships were reported on within the sample. This practice of referring to partners occurred throughout the sample collection period; however, there was a reduction (although not substantial) in the occurrence during the latter years of the sample. The enduring nature of the reporting on the relationships of women racing drivers in British newspapers is consistent with the findings of Biscomb and Matheson (2019). The reduction in the coverage may have been a consequence of Susie Wolff's retirement (the coverage of Wolff's marriage will be explored in more detail below as it was significant in the reporting). Nevertheless, there were similarities in the reporting to that of

relationships with parents, as there were several instances where partners were reported as a source of support or the motorsport ‘heritage’ of the partner was highlighted, with both being alluded to as a contributing factor towards the success of the women in the sport (Kemble, 2020).

**Table 18.** Examples of non-parental relationship reporting in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020.

| <i>Example</i>  | <i>Newspaper and date</i>                   |
|---|---|
| ‘she was able to enjoy a little downtime with long-term boyfriend Abbelen, also an accomplished racing driver’    | <i>Mail on Sunday</i> (May 29, 2016)        |
| ‘Wolff, who is married to executive director of Mercedes, Toto Wolff.’  | <i>Daily Express</i> (July 4, 2014)         |
| ‘Three months ago she wed trainer Rodrigo Garcia Millan, who helped nurse her.’                                   | <i>The Sun</i> (October 12, 2014)           |
| “‘I don’t have a boyfriend because I’m away a lot””   | <i>The Sun</i> (January 20, 2019)           |
| ‘Recently split from her husband of seven years, Patrick dates fellow NASCAR driver Ricky Stenhouse.’             | <i>The Sunday Times</i> (February 24, 2013) |
| ‘Pippa is also busy planning her wedding to her fiancé... she is immensely grateful to Robert for his support’    | <i>Mail on Sunday</i> (October 7, 2012)     |
| ‘De Silvestro revealed that everything has been sacrificed for F1. There are no boyfriends or significant others’ | <i>The Times</i> (May 10, 2014)             |
| ‘Bertha Benz, wife of car inventor Karl’  | <i>Daily Mirror</i> (April 17, 2013)        |

*Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.*

The most-reported relationship in the articles was that of Susie Wolff and her husband, Toto Wolff. Moreover, there was evidence of implied nepotism in how the relationship was reported in the newspapers during her career as an F1 test driver. As previously mentioned, Wolff was the only woman to drive an F1 car during a Grand Prix weekend during the sample collection period. Within the articles, subtle allusion to nepotism through her relationship with Toto who was a significant shareholder in the team that she was driving for, appeared to reinforce to the reader

the importance and influence of his role in F1 and by extension in her success. However, there were cases when nepotism was overtly discussed, for example:

A woman who has never won a senior race in a single seat car is married to Toto, a key shareholder in the Williams team and a multimillionaire who could afford the kind of price teams ask for a test session at a leading grand prix event.

*(The Times, July 4, 2014)*

Critics point to the fact she is the wife of Toto Wolff, the Mercedes boss who holds a 10 per cent share in Williams. His influence, combined with commercial reasons, are alleged to be at the heart of the matter.

*(Daily Mail, July 4, 2014)*

It is worth noting that both examples were published in articles that explained how Wolff 'would make history' by becoming the first woman in more than 20 years to drive during an F1 Grand Prix weekend. These examples are illustrative of ambivalent reporting (Fink, 2015), as, on the one hand, the media is celebrating her achievements and, on the other, their use of implied or explicit reference to nepotism casts doubt on how she has come to race at that level. As seen, both subtly and overtly, the narrative of nepotism that surrounded the reporting of Susie Wolff detracted from her achievements by trivialising and marginalising her involvement in the sport attributing her F1 success to her husband. Furthermore, it questioned her legitimacy in the sport.

The majority of the reporting on romantic relationships, as illustrated by examples in Table 18, followed the traditional heteronormative expectations of the media as they portrayed heterosexual relationships (Bruce, 2016). However, there was a handful of notable exceptions where the relationships of openly LGBTQ+ women racing drivers were reported on. For example, in *The Guardian's* (January 10, 2020) feature piece on racing driver Abbie Eaton, the journalist matter-of-factly highlighted her sexual orientation and did not dwell on it:

Having come out as lesbian last year she considers questions about sport and her sexuality and gender with the care she clearly believes they deserve. Yet she refuses to be defined by either, because it is the racing that matters.

*(The Guardian, January 10, 2020)*

There was also positive reporting of transgender women racing drivers, namely Roberta Cowell and Charlie Martin in the examined articles. Although not the main focus of this research, this finding cautiously appears to add some support to the

recent research by Petty and Pope (2019) and Kemble (2020), which appears to signal a change in the coverage of sportswomen away from the traditional approach of reinforcing compulsory heterosexuality of women athletes and perpetuating negative stereotypes of lesbian sportswomen in the media (Bruce, 2016). However, a more systematic study of this phenomenon is required in the future.

#### **5.4.2.2. *Upbringing and vocation***

Another way in which the newspapers trivialised and *othered* the women racing drivers was through focusing on their upbringing, careers, or education rather than their racing performance, often combining several gender discursive practices, such as gender-marking, infantilisation, or a focus on the dependence on others especially men (which reinforces the gendered hierarchy).

The upbringing of the women was frequently discussed in the articles, focusing on how they became involved in the sport and, more often than not, including how men influenced or provided access for their participation. Some reporters focused on women's family ties and their childhood experiences, especially if they had been involved in the sport from an early age and, as such, motorsport was a part of their *habitus*, for instance:

ONE of Maria de Villota's first memories is the deafening roar of racing car engines. When she was a little girl she would cling on to her father's hand as he prepared to do battle against the world's top drivers at Formula 1 circuits around the world. Pushing fast cars to the very limit is in her family's blood. In addition to her father Emilio, her younger brother and a sister are also involved in motor racing. Maria was hooked from the age of five when she was given a go-kart by her parents. From that moment all she dreamed of was lining up on the grid.

*(Daily Express, July 7, 2012).*

Alternatively, if the women had not been involved in the sport from a young age, the focus was on how they subsequently broke into motorsport. There was a tendency in the reporting to highlight the women's competitiveness and sporting abilities. For instance, *The Observer* (June 2, 2013) discussed how Susie Wolff's upbringing helped shape her career in the sport, drawing heavily upon quotes from her. The article emphasised her parents' motorcycling history and how it influenced her racing "I think it's in the blood". Moreover, it positioned Wolff as a competitive and sporty individual by discussing the sports (swimming and downhill skiing) she



partook in before racing. In the same vein, as well as discussing the role of Jamie Chadwick's brother in her introduction to the sport, Chadwick was framed as a sporty and competitive individual:

Chadwick was relatively late to karting. Hockey and skiing were her sporting passions... "when I started karting the competitive nature of motorsport instantly grabbed me" ... Chadwick rejected a trial with England Under 18 hockey squad in favour of the Ginetta Junior<sup>37</sup> scholarship weekend.  
(*Mail On Sunday*, July 7, 2019)

In the cases where women racing drivers were not raised by families already involved in motorsport, articles often highlighted the women's *other* sporting habitus and capital. A possible explanation for reporting on the sporting habitus and sporting capital (either motorsport or otherwise) of the women racing drivers is that it could be a way in which journalists justify to the reader the legitimacy of the woman in the sport, as they may have little knowledge of women racing drivers. However, the inclusion of the women racing drivers' upbringing in the reporting trivialises the women's involvement in the sport as it shifts the focus away from their athletic performance and focuses on childhood experiences, thus infantilising the women and not affording them full agency, a recurrent practice seen in the reporting of sportswomen (Fink, 2015).

In addition to the driver's upbringing being discussed in the articles, journalists also frequently reported on the vocations the women racing drivers had alongside their racing careers. These include roles in the motorsport industry or beyond; see Table 19 for examples of this reporting. Referencing the vocations that women racing drivers held alongside or prior to their racing careers places, perhaps unintentionally, a spotlight on the issue of the professionalisation of elite racing drivers. In order to be able to race, professional male racing drivers tend not to work, or if they do it generally is not outside the motorsport industry. In contrast, women who are racing at the top levels of the sport often work in other fields to fund their participation or have fallback training for their post-race careers. This is a situation that is all too common for sportswomen (Bowes and Culvin, 2021). It is important to note that within the sample, there were articles that discussed the careers of women

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<sup>37</sup> Ginetta Junior is a single-make racing series in the UK for teenagers aged 14-17 years old. The series is the support for the British GT Championship and is regularly on the BTCC program (British Automobile Racing Club, 2022).

racing drivers who were TV presenters on programs such as *Top Gear* or *The Grand Tour*, or as pundits or commentators on motorsport. These articles echo the reporting of male counterparts who often take roles within the media once retired, although the women in these cases were often still active racers. Here the racing capital of the women was heralded to legitimise their position in these roles of perceived knowledge and influence. What is more, highlighting women’s vocations serves to further marginalise and *other* them as, instead of focusing on their racing performance, it shifts the focus to alternative fields and highlights the difference between male and female racing drivers.

**Table 19.** Examples of vocation reporting

| <b>Example</b>   | <b>Newspaper and date</b>             |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 'A trainee accountant, she also advises her younger brother Ethan on his racing career.'   | <i>Daily Mail</i> (November 28, 2018) |
| 'De Villota, who has a degree in sports science from the European University of Madrid'  | <i>The Guardian</i> (July 4, 2012)    |
| “I joined my dad's building firm, as well as coaching other young drivers, which I still do today”   | <i>The Sun</i> (July 7, 2019)         |
| 'But she has turned her back on academia, ambitions of being a vet and every other avenue open to her to follow a career pushing herself and a car to its limits at crazy speeds on a variety of forest tracks.' | <i>Daily Mirror</i> (May 24, 2020)    |

*Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.*

Several of the interviewed journalists explained that they made references to the backgrounds of the racing drivers for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as previously mentioned, it was suggested that drawing upon the women’s personal lives and backgrounds created a way to engage with readers and educate them about who these women are. Journalist D articulated that “Those kinds of stories [about the background of racing drivers] are what new generations of fans find really interesting [...] you want to try and understand why people became interested in racing in the first place, and you know, it’s usually through their parents”. He also acknowledged that this was something that would be common for all new racing drivers coming into the sport, a point corroborated by Journalist B. Expanding on the point of

familiarising the reader with the women racing drivers, Journalist A reflected on the writing process that influences this focus on their background and relationships:

There is an element that these [women] are new drivers who most people won't have heard of, so one of the things that you would want to do is build a picture of who they are as a person. It gives what we call 'a lot of colour' in the copy as it makes it so much more of a better piece if the reader gets a sense of who they are as a person.

However, she went on further to acknowledge the difference in the way women are treated in this regard compared to men, saying, "But I also think it's a tricky one because in the men's side of things, as a rule, people will know a lot more about them and no one is going to wake up tomorrow and think we must do a profile piece on x male driver and what drives him.". This was a sentiment that Journalist D also shared:

If you've got a young girl in karting from an underprivileged background, that's an interesting story. If it is done responsibly, then I can understand it. It's just when it gets to the stage when it's like 'what's it like being a woman racing in a man's world?' and all those kinds of things. That's when I switch off. There has to be more to it than that to get interest [in the story].

Several journalists also highlighted that they found it much easier to access women racing drivers than male racing drivers for interviews. For example, Journalist E stated that not only were women racing drivers more interesting to talk to as "their stock answers aren't as dull [as the men's]", but he also felt the reasoning for this was "they [women] are much more open, and they don't have as much media training" meaning that he felt women were more likely to talk about their backgrounds than men. Moreover, several of the journalists acknowledged that including information about the personal lives and backgrounds of the women racing drivers was due to the lack of women racing at the top levels of the sport. Thus, for articles to be considered newsworthy, journalists need to focus on these non-sporting aspects.

As found in Chapter 4, 32.1% of articles about women racing drivers were found in 'features' section, rather than the 'news' or 'sports' sections. Journalist A explained that newspapers have recently been putting profile pieces on sportswomen in their supplements to "give women [readers] a little sense of what they might find in the sport section", as sports sections "generally across the board have a lack of female

readers”, due to a perception that there is “nothing in there for [women readers], nothing to interest them”. This editorial decision to create features on women racing drivers may account for a proportion of the articles focused on areas other than racing performance that was identified in this research.

The interviewed journalists saw the inclusion of the background of the racing drivers as a way to connect the drivers to the audience through ‘getting to know them’. Petty and Pope (2019, p. 497) argue that this is a way that the media provides a “more rounded image” of female athletes and helps to make them “celebrities” and as such more newsworthy. However, unlike Petty and Pope’s (2019) media analysis which found the majority of articles focused on the skill and performance of female footballers, this present research found this this was not the case in the reporting of women racing drivers, although there were signs of change towards more ‘performance’ based reporting from 2019. While it is important to note that there are some similarities in the framing of women racing drivers compared to men racing drivers in terms of the similar narratives (e.g. family relationships and reporting on their personal lives), these narratives are more dominant in the coverage of women racing drivers, whereas performance reporting is more dominant in the reporting of male racing drivers. The dominance of reporting on the personal lives of the women racing drivers identified in this research suggests a difference to readers between them and their male peers by positioning their backgrounds as more interesting than their racing. Thereby this difference can undermine women racing drivers’ place in the sport and frame them as *others* by positing the idea that women are a novelty in the sport.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

Overall, British newspapers’ representations of women racing drivers, through the use of gender discursive practices and narratives, have reinforced the hierarchical gender order of motorsport. This positions women as inferior to men and *others* them. *Othering* the women drivers, as seen in this research, questions their legitimacy in motorsport. As such, newspapers have represented women racing drivers to the readers, and potentially *other* women racing drivers, in ways that suggest women are not as important as men in the sport and therefore may be taken

less seriously. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (2001, p23) concept of the strength in the gendered hierarchy, which favours men, and is achieved by the processes where "it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction". Hence, through the use of such gendered discursive journalistic practices, the newspapers reinforce the gendered hierarchy that is the *natural* state of the field and, as such, (re)position men as the dominant gender in the sport and suggest that women are inferior. Furthermore, it could be argued that the gendered discursive journalistic practices found in this research, such as asymmetrical gender-marking, questioning the position of women in the sport, and shifting focus from their athletic achievements, are ways in which symbolic violence is enacted on and suffered by women. As such, the use of gendered discursive journalistic practices by the media, irrespective of the intention behind it, (re)enforces and perpetuates the patriarchal ideology and the subsequent gender hierarchy, positioning men as the *norm* within the sport, with motorsport as a *boys' club* and women as *others*.

The interviews conducted with the women racing drivers for this research showed that their position as women in the sport was often the main focus of media interviews that they took part in, rather than their racing performances. Additionally, the interviews highlighted that the women racing drivers often appeared to have internalised the symbolic violence enacted upon them, as evidenced by their justifications for the representations that the newspapers made, despite exhibiting frustrations with being positioned as *others*. Moreover, the interviews with journalists, a perspective that is not often considered in research, highlighted nuanced and complex reasoning for such gendered discursive journalistic practices in reporting on women racing drivers. This reasoning included: the structure of motorsport, the emergence of sex-segregated racing series which has created a 'need' to gender-mark, the sport-media complex, and the need for clarity and creating a 'good' story. The interviews also suggested that the *othering* of women racing drivers was often unintended and could be an unconscious practice. This provides insight into the doxa of motorsport reporting and shows that reporting often aligns with the doxa's values.

The interviews also showed that change could not occur in how newspapers report on women racers, or sportswomen in general, if the practices that reinforce

gendered hierarchies are not reviewed (such as style guides and journalism training). Reflective practices such as having conversations around how newspapers report on women racing drivers, and, indeed, on sportswomen in general, and examining those features can be “confrontational and somewhat uncomfortable”, as it goes against the habitus (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 49). However, Bourdieu (2005, p. 49) suggests that if these conversations occur, change can happen; he articulates that “people *en porte-à-faux*, misfits, who are put into question by the structures (operating through the positions) are able to challenge the structure, sometimes to the point of remaking it.” Therefore, British newspapers could adapt their reporting to be more inclusive of women racing drivers by establishing a standardised way of reporting on racing drivers, either gender-marking all of them or none of them. Furthermore, although there is recognition of the importance of highlighting women in the sport to engage new fans and encourage more women to take up the sport, consideration must be made about how these narratives are used in future newspaper reporting to avoid them continuing to marginalise and *other* women in the sport. Additionally, organisational issues in how the sport is governed and structured will need to be addressed to improve the representation of women racing drivers in the media, for example, the relevance of women’s titles.

This chapter has shown how women racing drivers have been positioned generally as *others* in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020. The next chapter expands on how women have been reported on in the media as *others* with a focus on their gender, positioning them as ‘extraordinary and exceptional’. It examines why the articles are written in the way they are, focusing on the theme ‘selling the story’ identified in the interviews with journalists. Furthermore, it explores the experiences of the interviewed women racing drivers through their voices on the focus on and scrutiny of their gender in the sport.

## Chapter 6. Taking the racing line: Selling the story of women racing drivers in British newspapers.

### 6.1. Introduction

I've been lucky enough to make history, be the first woman to do many things. I really just hope that I don't stop doing that. We have a lot more history to make.

(Danica Patrick quoted in Castro, 2022)

As outlined in the previous chapter, the narratives employed by British newspapers' in their coverage of women racing drivers are nuanced and complex. While women racing drivers are framed as *others* and outsiders in the sport, at the same time, their uniqueness in a sport dominated by men is admired and even celebrated. This chapter examines how this *other* status is celebrated through framing women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional women. As with the previous chapter, insights and experiences of journalists and racing drivers are drawn upon in the analysis.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the themes identified in the representations of women racing drivers, which frame women racing drivers as 'extraordinary and exceptional' women. These themes were: (1) a focus on the history of women racing drivers' involvement in the sport, (2) 'the first woman to', (3) trailblazers and (4) role models. The second section examines the underpinning theme of 'selling the story' which was identified in the interviews with journalists and explains why the previous four themes exist in the reporting of women racing drivers. Finally, the third section discusses the implications of selling the story and representing women racing drivers as 'extraordinary and exceptional' women, drawing upon both the journalists' and women racing drivers' perspectives. This chapter explores the duality of representing women racing drivers as 'exceptional and extraordinary', a narrative that simultaneously celebrates women racing drivers, positioning them as role models for future generations, and limits women racing drivers through reinforcing the gender hierarchy of the sport by presenting them as *others* and creating unrealistic expectations and pressure on existing women racing drivers.

## **6.2. *Portrayals in British newspapers of women racing drivers as 'extraordinary and exceptional'.***

Portraying women racing drivers as 'extraordinary and exceptional' is reflective of what Hargreaves (2013) suggests can occur through the media's reporting of international sportswomen; "the media has transformed top female performers into folk heroines and figures of international stature, and some of them became household names throughout the Western world" (p. 2). However, unlike the sportswomen that Hargreaves (2013, p. 2) refers to, only a very small proportion of women racing drivers to date have been victorious in the top echelons of the sport (such as Danica Patrick) or even competed at world championship level during the sample period (see Chapter 4 for details). Therefore, the presence of this narrative in the reporting of women racing drivers is somewhat unexpected given their relative lack of international success. In a similar vein to the narratives discussed in the previous chapter, this narrative was mainly found in coverage of the FIA Formula One World Championship (F1), although it was not exclusive to that championship. There were several ways the newspapers produced this narrative of 'extraordinary and exceptional' women within the articles.

The first was through discussion of the history of women racing drivers, with a focus on how few have been involved in the top echelons of the sport over the years. In approximately a fifth of the articles the history of women racing drivers in the sport was mentioned and it was found in all of the newspapers analysed. The historical facts often included statistics, records, or moments deemed significant for women participating in the sport. Most of the discussion surrounding women's historical involvement in motorsport was centred around their participation in F1 (68 articles). This is a typical example:

Maria Teresa de Filippis: The Italian became the first female to race in F1 at 1958 Belgian Grand Prix.

Lella Lombardi: Another Italian, raced 17 times in 1974-76 and only female to achieve a top-six finish.

Divina Galica: The Brit was multi-talented, captaining women's Olympic ski team in 1968 and 1972 and driving in three grands prix.

Desire Wilson: Qualified 16th for home grand prix in South Africa in 1981 but retired after her car was damaged.

Giovanna Amati: Rose through F3 and F3000 ranks, though she never qualified for F1 grid.



(*Daily Mail*, November 12, 2014)

The history of women racing drivers in F1 not only appeared as a list at the end of articles, as seen in the example above, but the information (often summarised) was also, and indeed more frequently, positioned in the main body of articles. Alternatively, some articles referenced the time that had elapsed since the last woman had taken part in an F1 Grand Prix weekend, or the time elapsed since Lella Lombardi raced (she was at the time of writing the only woman to have scored points in F1 history). When the history of women racing drivers was discussed in racing series other than F1 (that is, WRC, NTT INDYCAR, NASCAR Cup Series, and land speed record attempts), the articles also appeared to be positive towards women racing drivers' involvement in the series. More often than not, the history of women in motorsport was discussed in relation to their achievements as a woman compared to other women, despite them competing against men. On the one hand, this emphasis on the relative lack of women in the sport continues to perpetuate the gendered hierarchy of motorsport (Matthews and Pike, 2016) and their *otherness* within it. On the other hand, it celebrates these women's achievements by reinforcing how few women have been involved in the sport and it positions them as achieving something exceptional, even though it may not necessarily be a race or championship win.

While previous research has highlighted the inclusion of history in the reporting of sportswomen, this has tended to be in sex-segregated sports with women's sport being compared to men's sport, creating debate about whether this further marginalises sportswomen or not (for example Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019). Despite this, it has been suggested that positioning women's achievements in history provides a benchmark for their current accomplishments, highlighting the significance of their performances, celebrating their achievements and to an extent legitimising their success (Leflay and Biscomb, 2021). The findings of this research add to the understanding of how women's sporting history is reported in British newspapers. Furthermore, this research has shown that the history of women's involvement in a sport (motorsport in this case) can be used to celebrate current sportswomen's achievements in an arena dominated by men and in sex-segregated sporting fields.

The next way women racing drivers were celebrated in the articles was by reporting them as the first woman in history to achieve a feat within motorsport (see Table 20 for examples). This theme was seen throughout the sample period in all six newspapers analysed. Reporting on women as the first of their gender to achieve a feat in the sport emphasises that these women have achieved something remarkable and exemplary as it has not been accomplished previously. Moreover, this type of reporting positions these women competing in motorsport as more than just average women, as what they have achieved is unique. The use of the theme 'first woman to' in motorsport has been previously reported by Sloop (2005, p. 206) who suggested that it "simultaneously denies the importance of gender while ultimately reemphasizing it in its own logic". Sloop (2005, p. 206) concluded that the 'first woman to' theme ended in "tragedy" in the case of Deborah Renshaw. After having framed Renshaw as the 'first woman to', the media subsequently claimed that she had been pushed beyond her skill level when she was involved in a fatal accident (Sloop, 2005). Consequently, Sloop (2005) suggested that due to the Renshaw incident the 'first woman to' theme indirectly put into question the ability of all women racing drivers, present and future. However, within this current study the theme was instead framed in a celebratory and hopeful manner in the articles analysed. In the same vein as reporting women's history in the sport, building this representation of women racing drivers as the 'first woman to' is nuanced as it highlights their supposed *otherness* while concurrently celebrating their success.

The third theme identified in the analysis of in how women racing drivers were framed by British newspapers as 'extraordinary and exceptional' was 'trailblazers' (see Table 21 for examples). Women racing drivers were often framed as 'trailblazers' in conjunction with the 'first woman to' narrative. Representations in this category emphasised the significance of their achievements as a woman as opposed to the result of the relevant race. Their involvement appeared more important than the outcome. The trailblazer theme primarily positions the women as having achieved a remarkable feat within the sport, suggesting that they can change perceptions of women participating in the sport and open up access to the field for other women.

**Table 20.** Examples of ‘first women to’ reporting of women racing drivers.

| <i>Example</i>   | <i>Newspaper and date</i>                |
|--|--|
| ‘The first British woman to qualify for the world-famous IndyCar racing series’  | <i>Mail on Sunday</i> (October 7, 2012)  |
| ‘SUSIE WOLFF will this season become the first woman in 22 years to compete in an F1 event.’   | <i>Daily Express</i> (February 25, 2014) |
| ‘Danica Patrick. Named Rookie of the Year in the 2005 season of IndyCar, America's equivalent of F1, and became the first woman to win an IndyCar race in 2008.’ | <i>The Guardian</i> (August 9, 2010)     |
| ‘The first all-female line-up to compete’  | <i>Daily Mirror</i> (March 2, 2020)      |
| ‘Jamie became the first woman in history to win a British Formula 3 race’  | <i>The Sun</i> (January 20, 2019)        |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

However, framing women racing drivers as the ‘first woman to’ or as ‘trailblazers’ can be problematic. For example, Danica Patrick was referred to as the “iconic female trailblazer” in an article in *The Guardian* (November 17, 2017) implying that she was the first woman to compete in IndyCar. However, this was not the case as three women had preceded Patrick’s participation in the sport (Janet Guthrie was the first in 1977, followed by Lyn St James and Sarah Fischer (IMS LLC, 2022)). This misleading use of the trailblazing narrative in the reporting has been previously identified by McLachlan (2019) in the reporting of a boom in women’s sports reporting in Australia. She found that reporting surrounding sportswomen often used temporal framing and a trailblazing narrative that ignored the past achievements of women in the sport to focus on the success of current sportswomen (McLachlan, 2019). In this current study it is interpreted that use of such themes in the articles examined was a way to celebrate and acknowledge women racing drivers rather than patronise their achievements in the sport or undermine the history of women in the sport, however it must be noted that others may interpret it differently.

**Table 21.** Examples of trailblazing reporting of women racing drivers.

| <i>Example</i>   | <i>Newspaper and Date</i>                 |
|--|---|
| 'British woman who blazed the trail, the last British woman to challenge the male domination of Formula 1 was Divina Galica in the Seventies.' | <i>Daily Express (July 7, 2012)</i>       |
| 'Nielsen is competing for the third time at Circuit de la Sarthe, having already blazed a trail with a hugely successful career.'              | <i>The Guardian (June 13, 2018)</i>       |
| 'Danica Patrick (its iconic female trailblazer)'   | <i>The Guardian (November 17, 2017)</i>   |
| 'She is widely considered to have a strong chance of ending the four-decade wait for a female Formula One driver'                              | <i>The Sunday Times (August 11, 2019)</i> |
| 'Katherine Legge is a pioneer for thousands of British women who believe they have the right stuff to be racing drivers.'                      | <i>The Times (January 18, 2012)</i>       |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

British newspapers also represented women racing drivers as 'trailblazers' by highlighting the journey they had taken to compete in the sport. These journeys were often framed as a challenge or a struggle, drawing upon the *other* status attributed to women in the sport (see Chapter 5), and referred to barriers they encounter to participate in the sport. For example, "Making it in Formula 1 is tough even with the talent and ruthless ambition of the champion drivers. To make it as a woman is almost impossible." (*Daily Express*, June 23, 2014). By discussing women racing drivers' journeys to compete in motorsport in this manner (as a challenge or struggle) newspapers present the idea to readers that to become a woman racing drivers in the highest levels of the sport is against the odds. Moreover, the fact that in articles readers are frequently reminded of the swathes of men competing compared to the minuscule number of women further compounds how exceptional their achievements are, by suggesting to readers that to become a woman racing driver is beyond the orthodoxy of the field and is, in short, extraordinary. This finding has similarities to those of Matthews and Pike (2016), who argued "recent articles continue to perpetuate traditional concerns regarding the 'reasons' why women cannot and do not race in 'a man's world'" (p. 1541). However, this current study has found that this narrative appears to have shifted in the decade (2010 to 2020)

since they conducted their research, with British newspapers increasingly reporting the challenges faced by women racing drivers as surmountable. Overwhelmingly, women racing drivers were represented positively and their heterodoxical position was celebrated. However, the fact that women racing drivers can both be marginalised and trivialised (see Chapter 5) while simultaneously being celebrated reinforces the fact that British newspapers' representations of women racing drivers are complex and contradictory.

Closely aligned to the framing of women racing drivers as 'trailblazers', women racing drivers were also positioned as 'role models' for women and girls, albeit less often than the previous three themes. A sporting role model can be defined as a sportsperson whom others aspire to follow in terms of performance, success and character, and as such they are deemed to be admirable and exemplary (Vescio, Wilde and Crosswhite, 2005). Women racing drivers were referred to as role models throughout the sample period, however the narrative was most prevalent from 2018 onwards. This could be due to the general positive shift in attitudes towards sportswomen in society which is explored further in Chapter 7. Women tended to be represented as 'role models' at the tail end of their careers (for example Danica Patrick, Susie Wolff, Maria de Villota, and Sabine Schmidt), or if they were participating in the WSeries. It is worth noting that women racing drivers appeared to be viewed as role models for their involvement and achievements as women in the sport rather than their racing (performance) achievements. Moreover, their role-model status was often framed in relation to their place in the history of women's involvement in the sport.

Within the articles, the role model potential of a women racing driver was implied through the journalists' use of language, such as being described as inspirational. Moreover, women racing drivers were also described as role models through selected quotes from the women racing drivers concerned, pundits or retired racing drivers to name but a few in articles. For example, Susie Wolff was quoted describing her desire for young women to be inspired by her involvement in the 2014 F1 British Grand Prix:

"If there are just a handful of little girls who are there and see me driving and suddenly realise they could do the same, that is the biggest positive to come out of it," she said. "It's not a man's world anymore. It just needs to be shown

that women can compete at that level and then you will get more and more entering."

(*Daily Express*, July 4, 2014)

This example is characteristic of the quotes in articles from women racing drivers in which they articulate their hopes they will be seen as role models and thereby encourage more women and girls into the sport. However, within the articles and during the interviews with women racing drivers there were several who did not necessarily describe themselves as role models, although many acknowledged that the visibility of their involvement in the sport could be used to inspire more women and girls to participate.

The theme of sportswomen as role models in newspapers is not new in sports media scholarship (such as Biscomb and Griggs, 2013; Hall and Oglesby, 2016; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021). Examples of sportswomen being framed in British newspapers as role models can be seen in the study by Biscomb and Griggs (2013) who found evidence of England's women cricketers at the 2009 Cricket World Cup being framed as positive role models to increase female participation in a male-dominated sport. This could still be found in Leflay and Biscomb's (2021) study where they found similar positive role model representations in coverage of England's elite women's teams competing at international events during the summer of 2017 in the four British newspapers they examined (i.e. *Daily Telegraph*; *The Times*; *Daily Mail*; *Daily Mirror*). Both of these studies suggested that the international successes of the English women's teams lead to the players being described by the British newspapers as inspirational and role models. However, it is worth noting that Hall and Oglesby (2016) argue that sportswomen framed as role models are a scarcity in sports media coverage. My study has found that unlike the representations of elite international female role models in sex-segregated team sports outlined in the studies mentioned above (Biscomb and Griggs, 2013; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021), the equivalent of international-level success in motorsport (i.e. world championship level) appears not to be a determinant for role model narratives of women racing drivers in British newspapers. Because motorsport is a sex-integrated but male-dominated sport, it is deemed remarkable for women to be racing in the top echelons of the sport regardless of the nature of the competition. Therefore, it could be argued that their role-model status is more aligned to their achievements as a woman in the sport than their racing performance. This measure of success may change over

time, depending on how many more women progress in the ranks of motorsport and how quickly they do so, and should be investigated in future research.

The combined effect of all of the abovementioned themes surrounding women racing drivers—positioning them in history, the ‘first woman to’, a ‘trailblazer’, and as a ‘role model’—combined with their *other* status within the sport, has created an impression that these women racing drivers covered in the newspapers are ‘extraordinary and exceptional’. The admiration observed in this research towards women racing drivers in British newspapers exceeds that identified in previous research (Matthews and Pike, 2016; Tolvhed, 2017). Interviewing the journalists revealed that this narrative of women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional was often the direct result of a need to sell the story.

### **6.3. *The extraordinary and exceptional woman sells the story: Newsworthiness of women racing drivers***

During the interviews conducted with journalists for this research, it became apparent that they felt the themes detailed above employed in the coverage of women racing drivers were often influenced by the relative lack of women drivers at the top levels of the sport. The journalists suggested that because women racing drivers did not appear as often as men in racing series, there was a need to ‘sell’ articles about women drivers to their editors. News is, in essence, a commodity sold by newspapers in a competitive market, a fact that influences the content they choose to publish as they try to maximise sales (Tunstall, 1996; Harcup, 2021). Or as Bourdieu puts it “the journalistic field is permanently subject to trial by market” (1998, p. 71), a point that several journalists reiterated. Summarising the process of producing articles for newspapers Journalist B explained:

It’s up to the journalist to come up with the stories. It’s up to the journalist to do the digging, and you have to effectively sell it to the newspaper and say, ‘Look, I’ve got this really good idea, this driver is interesting because of XYZ’. So, you have to take the story up and pitch it to them. It’s rare that they actually say, ‘right we need a piece on Jamie Chadwick or Lewis’ [be]cause it’s my job to give it to them in the first place.

Three more of the interviewed journalists described similar experiences of pitching the stories to their editors rather than being told to write about women racing drivers.

This finding highlights the power that editors hold in the newspaper publishing process; a point previously identified in research (see Laucella *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, it also indicates that, in order to secure coverage of women racing drivers, journalists need to be aware and interested enough to pitch such a story.

The journalists' awareness of women racing drivers in the sport may be, in part, due to the nature of the sport and their associated 'beat', that is, the area of specialism they report on (for example, football, crime, or politics) (Hardin, 2010; Hardin and Zhong, 2010). Traditionally, journalists' beats have not necessarily included women's sports as the majority of sports are sex segregated (Laucella *et al.*, 2017). However, due to motorsport being sex-integrated, reporting on women racing drivers could be assumed to be part of the motorsport beat, which was either the main beat or was encompassed within a broader beat. Moreover, previous research has shown that when women's sport is associated with a journalist's beat, coverage of women's sport increased as journalists were more likely to promote such stories, as it was part of their job (Sherwood *et al.*, 2017). What this research has found is that in order for a journalist to pitch stories about women racing drivers, not only must they deem such stories newsworthy, but they must also have an awareness of the drivers and their habitus and inalienable values must be aligned.

Not only does the motor racing journalist have to sell the story but the editor needs to buy it, deeming the inclusion of an article about a woman racing driver to be newsworthy and interesting for their readers. If these factors are not aligned the articles will not get published. This power is reminiscent of the implications of allodoxia<sup>38</sup> on the journalistic field described by Bourdieu (1998, pp. 74-75) thus:

By orientating choices (editors' choices, for one) towards the least demanding and most commercially viable products, these journalist-intellectuals reinforce the impact of audience rating or the best-seller list on reception of cultural products and ultimately if indirectly, on a cultural production itself.

However, further research is required to understand the power and influence of editors relating to the inclusion or exclusion of articles about women racing drivers, as currently, this is conjecture, as no editors had been interviewed for this study. A couple of the journalists described failed pitches for articles; their reasoning for this

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 3 for allodoxia definition.



rejection was that editors did not deem the articles the right fit for the newspaper (it must be noted that this may have been a legitimate response to a poorly constructed pitch) or that there was a lack of awareness of women's participation in motorsport at the respective desk which prevented these articles from being accepted. This rejection reflects the attitudes journalists have previously articulated in research regarding barriers to articles about sportswomen being accepted by newspapers (e.g. Peeters, Elling and Sterkenburg, 2019). Furthermore, the findings of this research have drawn attention to the power that journalists at all levels within a newspaper hold over how and whether women racing drivers are reported in newspapers—reflecting Bourdieu's (1991, p. 281 n34) argument that a journalist "holds sway over the mass media and [...] thus has power over every kind of symbolic capital (the power of 'making or unmaking reputations')". All of the journalists interviewed in this study indicated that they believed attitudes and approaches of editors were changing and rejection on the basis of a lack of knowledge of women's sport was reducing, reflecting recent research on journalists' perspectives on reporting on sportswomen (Peeters, Elling and Sterkenburg, 2019). Chapter 7 investigates these perceived changes in the editors' acceptance of articles about sportswomen in more detail.

What is more, these findings reinforce previous research about the gatekeeping position held by editors which can limit or increase coverage given to sportswomen (Laucella *et al.*, 2017), something that is unsurprising considering the hierarchal structure of newspapers (Harcup, 2021). Crucially, Gee and Leberman (2011) identified that articles about sportswomen tended to be subjected to a harsher editorial selection process than sportsmen. They found that sports editors required articles about sportswomen to be more than just newsworthy (i.e. based on performance and results) which were the criteria for men's sport; instead, for publication, the performance of sportswomen needed to be considered exceptional (Gee and Leberman, 2011). This could in part explain why women racing drivers were positioned as 'extraordinary and exceptional' women in the articles examined. However, while the findings of Gee and Leberman (2011) found extraordinary sportswomen had to be winners to be considered for editorial inclusion, as we have seen, this appeared not to be the case for articles about women racing drivers in this research (as the majority of women had not been winners). Thus, when examining

motorsport there appears to be a differential definition of success of women racing drivers compared to other sportswomen. Future investigations should examine sports similar to motorsport that are sex-integrated and should examine in greater detail the editorial decision-making process for the inclusion of articles about women racing drivers.

Examining editorial gender-related decision-making, Laucella *et al.* (2017, p. 785) found that 60% of the USA sports editors they interviewed felt “that there is little appetite for women’s sports coverage” and they suggested that this can affect the coverage given to sportswomen due to the gatekeeping role the editors hold. Additionally, extant research has suggested that even if editors consider stories on sportswomen newsworthy, the “existing features of newswork still demoted them. In particular, space constraints, which change daily, influenced selection decisions” (Sherwood *et al.*, 2017, p. 658). Thus men’s sport is often given the priority of space. Likewise, Bourdieu reminds us that “even if the actors have an effect as individuals, it is the structure of the journalistic field that determines the intensity and orientation of its mechanisms.” (1998, p. 73). This notion of the enduring structural constraints of the newspaper publishing processes was evident in this research. All the journalists acknowledged that column space was prioritised for F1—currently a male-only space—and other motorsport disciplines, which may include women racing drivers, were only given the remainder of space (if any). Therefore, the interviewees highlighted that the need to ‘sell’ stories about women racing drivers to the editors (the gatekeepers) was paramount for them to progress to publication, as they were often seen as outside the traditional coverage required for the beat. Moreover, the journalists explicitly identified this as one of the reasons coverage of women racing drivers represents them as exceptional and extraordinary individuals.

The journalists interviewed also expressed the need to ‘sell’ the story to readers, another motivation for framing women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional women in the articles. They cited several different reasons to explain this. Several journalists believed that readers may not necessarily be interested in women racing drivers and thus the narrative might create excitement. Alternatively, they suggested that some readers may not even be aware of women participating in the sport and by selling the story to them they might raise awareness. It was even suggested that some readers may not understand that men and women can race

against each other. Journalist E explained why he felt that women racing drivers were positioned as exceptional individuals, saying:

I think the reason why those stories get played like that is because you need to sell it to readers. You need a reason to say, 'read this piece'. So, if they are [represented as] an extraordinary individual or it has not been done for years, [these] are both great ways of saying 'please read on'.

This reflects what McLachlan (2019, p. 15) suggests that these narratives can "incite[sic] public imagination". Elaborating on the engagement of readers, Journalist D said that he thought that people see women racing drivers as an "underdog story", which he felt was a little "disingenuous". However, he believed this notion of women racing drivers as underdogs influenced how women racing drivers were represented: "I think people want to tell stories that are easy to understand and have an interesting narrative". What is more, reinforcing the previously identified dominance of F1 in British motorsport newspaper coverage (see Chapters 4 and 5), he explained that the prospect of a woman racing in F1

Would be such an amazing story because in comparison to another sport, such as football, the chances of a female football player playing in the Premier League is almost non-existent. And I think people are very fascinated by the prospect of the female F1 driver.

(Journalist D)

Therefore, in his view, women racing drivers being represented as extraordinary and underdogs not only fulfils these reader requirements, but, especially in the context of F1, can build an excitement around the driver as they may be 'the one' who breaks through into the series. Additionally, he highlighted a desire from journalists to write about interesting topics, but he also suggested that the needs of the readership have evolved and broadened in recent years, becoming more receptive to sportswomen. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous chapter (5), Journalist A indicated that in addition to selling the stories to existing readers, the narratives may help entice new readers (particularly women) to the sports pages. The desires of the journalists in this study to educate and tell a story align with recent research which identified that sports journalists perceive themselves as storytellers and educators (Perreault and Ferrucci, 2020). Unlike the findings of English (2017), who found that sports journalists avoided being cheerleaders or sports fans and instead took a more critical approach, it seems that when reporting on women racing

drivers, the interviewed journalists justified a cheerleading approach as women racing drivers are considered outside of the typical coverage.

These findings reflect the underlying assumptions that sports editors have historically held that readers of sports sections are not interested in women's sports, as highlighted in previous research (Laucella *et al.*, 2017). It is important to note that research has focused on sports editors' assumptions about their reader's views on sportswomen and not on news editors or feature editors. This can be seen through the journalists' belief that they need to 'sell the story' to their editors and to encourage and educate their readers to read about women racing drivers, an area which has been relatively invisible in motorsport reporting (see Matthews and Pike, 2016 and Chapter 4). However, several of the journalists interviewed felt there had been a change within the past five years with an increased desire for articles about women's sport. Thus, looking to the future, the need to 'sell the story' to readers may diminish as readers' expectations for coverage change, i.e., they no longer need to be sold the story as they are already aware of and interested in the women racing drivers. All the journalists also said that if more women were racing at the top levels of the sport, reporting could be more in line with that of men, with a greater focus on racing. Further research is warranted to examine the motivations of sports journalists reporting on sportswomen in sex-integrated sports and how this is impacted by their personal views on sportswomen and the sports they are covering. Also, research is needed to understand definitively if the assumptions regarding readers' interest in women's sport are correct or not.

### **6.3.1. *Why use history in selling the story?***

As previously discussed, one of the ways that women racing drivers were framed in the articles in the overarching narrative of 'extraordinary and exceptional' women was through the theme of historical references. When the journalists were asked why articles included this narrative and why there was reference to the historical position of women racing drivers, they tended to refer to the notion of engagement or education of the reader. For example, Journalist B explained that his reason for including historical information was based around assumptions of readership knowledge and journalistic style:

You go into the history because you're always looking for statistics and information to put in your piece. And I also think it gives context. So, you need to say that the reason why this person is driving for this team and why it would be so significant—because she would be the first person to do so since X. And that's probably why you see coverage that is looking at the historical stuff. Also, there is probably ignorance, in the sense that they [readers] are not aware [of women racing drivers]. So, you know, I would probably argue that the majority of people do not know that females have been in F1.

Echoing these sentiments, Journalist A added that plotting out the history of women in the sport allows “people to get a better sense of the history because it's just kind of folklore and people don't really know for sure, and that's our job as newspapers to inform them”. Moreover, Journalist A said that the inclusion of historical information provided an opportunity to educate the readers as it “is our way of saying this is someone to watch out for”. Further, Journalist A pointed out the importance of reporting women racing drivers as the ‘first woman to’:

It is just natural. So, Jamie [Chadwick] has actually been the first to do a number of things. So that in itself is (a) news and (b) a record, a historical record. I always come back to the idea that people say that journalism is the rough draft, the first draft of history. But that is true. If we don't write down that she has this historic achievement, that won't be in the history books. And that is a huge part of what she's achieved, and it should always go on to be noted.

The above quote goes further than just explaining how journalism can simply educate readers, it highlights the power of journalism in recording history and knowledge. Elaborating on this point further, Journalist A used an example of Catie Munnings being reported as the first woman to win a European Rally title in 50 years. She pointed out that “it would be far weirder if we weren't referencing” ‘historical’ or ‘first woman to’ or ‘trailblazing’ moments of women racing drivers’ careers. These moments were “kind of a big thing as that sort of shot her into the limelight” (Journalist A). And as such, Journalist A felt that placing Munnings in history helped to engage with the readers. Likewise, both Journalists D and E agreed that placing women racing drivers in history helps to build the story and encourages people to read on. Most of the women racing drivers interviewed articulated the importance of highlighting women as being the first to achieve particular feats in the sport. However, winning races remained their priority over their place in history.

Additionally, several journalists pointed out that listing the history of women racing, such as the women racing drivers who have raced in F1, is sometimes presented in a pull-out box. This tool was described as “amazingly useful” (Journalist A) as it allowed for information to be presented outside the main body of the article and clearly demonstrated to readers the background of women in the sport. However, as the articles were collected via LexisNexis Academic (see Chapter 3 for methodology), there was no way to ascertain whether this was how the lists of historical achievements were presented in the newspapers, as the search results only provided text and not the layout of the article in the newspaper, a point future research could investigate.

The belief of journalists that representing women racing drivers in a historical context helps engage and educate readers found in this current study is reflective of the observations made by Osborne and Skillen (2020) on the inclusion of women’s sports history in media reporting. They suggested that the apparent increased visibility of women’s sport in media during the 2010s has “given rise to a degree of journalistic curiosity with regard to the historic specificities of their participation in, and their relationships with, sport” (Osborne and Skillen, 2020, p. 418). Significantly, they argued that this increased ‘journalistic curiosity’ has resulted in journalists highlighting significant achievements and record-breaking performances, and also elevating facts about women in the sport (Osborne and Skillen, 2020). This reporting focus was evident in the articles examined for this study and was raised by several of the interviewed journalists. Furthermore, the accounts from the journalists appeared to support the notion of journalistic curiosity surrounding of the history of sportswomen and that it is embedded in the reporting of women racing drivers.

Currently, there is some debate amongst academics about whether positioning women in a sport’s history is constructive (e.g. Petty and Pope, 2019) or detrimental (e.g. Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019). Predominantly this has been a debate grounded in sex-segregated sports where the women’s version has been compared to the men’s. On the one hand, it can be seen as a way to “break down gendered distinctions” which have held women’s sport as inferior (Petty and Pope, 2019, p. 496), providing an explanation for the inequalities that women currently experience in sport (Woodward, 2017). Additionally, it can legitimise sportswomen’s success by

situating it in the history of participation, raising their profiles, and celebrating sportswomen (Leflay and Biscomb, 2021). On the other hand, it can be seen to reinforce male superiority within a sport (Black and Fielding-Lloyd, 2019). Significantly, this research adds to the current debate on including women's sporting history in media reporting.

The findings of this current study show that the history of women racing drivers is used to highlight the longstanding involvement of women in the sport, which as the journalists interviewed suggested many readers may not be aware of. The use of history legitimises women racing drivers' position in the sport rather than undermining or trivialising their achievements. This finding supports Leflay and Biscomb's (2021) notion that positioning sportswomen in history raises their profile and legitimises their performances by celebrating rather than diminishing their success. Positioning women racing drivers in the historical context of their gendered participation appears to be a key factor in selling the story and engaging the readers. The narrative of women being extraordinary and exceptional is a consequence of this framing. However, it should be noted that whereas one might expect to see a sex-integrated history, given that the sport is sex-integrated, the focus is mainly on the history of women racing drivers which reminds the reader that the sport is predominantly a space for men. Moreover, the framing of women racing drivers as the 'first women to' found in this study appears to be a celebration of those achievements and not a negative portrayal of the relative lack of women in the field as a failure. Although currently, the inclusion of women's history in the sport appears to be viewed in a positive light, there will be a point when instead of informing and educating readers, it could be regarded as a way to highlight a failure of women in the sport; especially if reporting shifts away from the current celebratory framing.

Future research should continue to monitor this aspect of the reporting and whether this practice endures as the visibility of women racing drivers in international motorsport continues to grow (as the current trend indicates, see Chapter 4), and the previous levels of success women racing drivers have achieved are surpassed. As argued throughout this chapter, the way women racing drivers were represented as exceptional and extraordinary centred around their gender and their *otherness* in the sport, which can be perceived to have both positive and negative implications.

## **6.4. Implications of selling the story and representing women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional**

### **6.4.1. Making women in the sport visible**

One of the key implications of framing women racing drivers as exceptional and extraordinary women, playing on their *othered* status in the sport to sell the story, is that it has increased the visibility of women racing drivers in the media. The journalists interviewed explained that without such narratives the volume of coverage, which is already limited (see Chapter 4), would be even smaller. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, this is due to the limited number of women racing at the top levels of the sport and the spaces where women race being outside the British media's predominant focus on F1.

The increase in the visibility of women in newspaper coverage of motorsport allows those outside the sport to see the opportunity for other women and girls to compete. Previous research has consistently suggested that the relative invisibility of sportswomen in media has resulted in limited sporting role models for young women and girls (see, for example, Leflay and Biscomb, 2021). The lack of coverage given to sportswomen has been found to reduce the motivation of women to participate in sport as they require gender-aligned role models to show the possibility of succeeding, especially in sports where female participation has been historically limited (Midgley *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, the findings of this study are somewhat encouraging as the coverage of women in the sport has increased between 2010 and 2020 (see Chapter 4), and when combined with women racing drivers being represented as role models and trailblazers in the articles, this may encourage more women and girls into the sport in the future. Significantly, in British newspapers women racing drivers were represented as 'extraordinary and exceptional' women due to their achievements in the sport rather than because of their physical appearance (as discussed in Chapter 5), which has previously been a mainstay of media reporting of sportswomen (Bruce, 2016; Konjer, Mutz and Meier, 2019). Moreover, this finding adds to the recent research of Leflay and Biscomb (2021) as it supports the idea that there is a shift in how the media view sportswomen whereby women are now taken more seriously.



Several of the interviewed women racing drivers felt that themes of 'role models' and 'trailblazers' in the media could inspire future generations of women to participate in the sport. For example, Racing Driver C felt that women racing drivers being represented as extraordinary women was "fantastic" and should be "shouted about" as it "raises the [glass] ceiling and it's a goal to surpass. We can do better, and we can keep pushing". In the same vein, Racing Driver F felt there were benefits to such representations:

when girls are reading it then they pick up on those things... it will encourage the younger generations to come into it [motorsport]. But if young girls aren't seeing it, they're not going to think about it and just take up normal [stereotypical] hobbies.

However, as previously mentioned, being a role model was not the reason that drove the women racing drivers to race, although, being framed as one did seem to be a source of pride and further motivation. As Journalist C, who had worked with several women racing drivers during her career, explained:

I don't think any of them are going to get too worried about being called a trailblazer, they just love being where they are. Another important thing is how they see themselves, not how we see them... So, they see themselves that if they can encourage other young females into it then that would be something they would be proud of.

Indeed, many of the women racing drivers reflected that they would have liked there to have been more female role models in the sport when they were younger or had started in the sport. Only three of the eight women interviewed stated they had female role models when they first got involved in the sport. This research has identified that women racing drivers are increasingly being represented as role models, which was not found in previous research (Matthews and Pike, 2016). Moreover, representing women racing drivers as role models can be seen as a way to encourage more women into the sport. This may help increase participation and challenge the doxa of motorsport.

However, it is worth noting that the effects of representing women racing drivers as role models and trailblazers can be somewhat nuanced. At the same time as providing benefits to those outside the sport and to some women racing drivers, it can add pressure and additional expectations on those women already in the sport, a point that Journalist A made:

I'd like them not to feel that they owe anyone that kind of trailblazing, role model narrative. But I do believe that all sports people are role models, whether they like it or not. And it is a part of the job. I don't have a lot of sympathy for example for Premier League footballers who say, 'well I didn't ask to be a role model'. I'm sorry but that is part of the job now. So, women's sport to a degree is just part of that picture. But I think if they are only ever asked about blazing the way for other females, that would be a shame. All I would hope for is that they would be asked about their actual achievements in the sport as well... Some of our female athletes have said to me that they hate being asked, some really hate being asked about being a trailblazer or on gender equality in sport, they're just done with it, and they just want to be asked about the sport.

Simply put, she cautioned that such narratives are to be expected for a sportsperson in the public eye. However, she believed that there are greater expectations on sportswomen compared to men and this may overshadow their athletic achievements. As such, producers of these narratives need to consider and balance how women racing drivers and sportswomen in general are presented in articles.

Additionally, a couple of women racing drivers expressed some concern about the implications of representing women racing drivers as role models and trailblazers in media. Racing Driver A felt that being described as a woman to achieve a first in her discipline was positive, saying "that's pretty freaking awesome to have that go down in history". However, she also said that despite the positive aspect to being framed as "the first woman to" she felt that sometimes it distracted attention from her performance as it focused on her gender: "It is to identify you as a woman just because you're doing a male-dominated sport, it doesn't mean you have to make such a prominent aspect out of it really". Several of the women racing drivers made this point during their interviews, as they suggested that the coverage given to women racing drivers in newspapers was partly because they were women in a male-dominated space rather than their sporting success. Furthermore, Racing Driver B suggested that she felt that how she was sometimes questioned in interviews was intended to create the narrative of her being exceptional, however she actively tried not to let that narrative be articulated: "So it's funny the way they say things, but I try and steer the direction of an interview to make sure that it comes across as anyone can do it". This is reflective of how Ewy Rosqvist, the Swedish rally driver, managed the representations of her gender in the sport and did not allow it to define her racing career (Tolvhed, 2017). However, Racing Driver B did acknowledge the reason why she felt such narratives exist adding:

I totally get it, it's a good story to put out there, its breaking barriers, it's changing the way and scope of the sport, it's trying to make it known that it's not just a male sport anymore, and that is super important, and I understand why it's been done.

These findings highlight that although representations of women racing drivers as role models and trailblazers can encourage women into the sport, at the same time this framing can be seen by those in the sport to reduce drivers to their gender. Future research should look further into the impact on women racing drivers of such representations. Moreover, although not all the drivers and journalists expressed these opinions, journalists should consider the implications of such representations and ensure that they use these narratives only when appropriate and do not pigeonhole all women as role models and trailblazers just because they are women in the sport.

#### **6.4.2. *Expectations of women in the sport***

A somewhat unexpected implication of selling the story, described by several journalists, centred around the potential for exaggerating the significance and the potential of a woman racing driver. It was suggested that this exaggeration was a result of the relative lack of women racing drivers, which in some cases resulted in the significance of a women racing driver being overstated or overplayed in the reporting:

So that sort of thing [future potential and significance of a woman racing driver] is exaggerated, but that's part of the numbers game. If there's only one or two [women racing drivers] to write about they will get more stories which makes them more, makes the coverage 'more', I don't want to say exaggerated but it does mean you need to find something, a hook to write about.

(Journalist E)

Moreover, Journalist E cautioned that there had to be a balance when reporting on women racing drivers as with such stories there was a risk that the reporting would "feel like tokenism" and he reiterated that there were occasions when there was "an element of talking up" women racing drivers. These sentiments were echoed by Journalist A as she pointed out that some women are reported as trailblazers when they had not in fact been the first to achieve the feat in question:

There are other [women] drivers, for example if you look at the kind of wider WSeries group of drivers, who actually, technically, apart from let's say being an inaugural WSeries driver, they have done nothing that is technically a first or a record in that sense. But they will most definitely be painted as a trailblazer of sorts. That's a little trickier because they haven't asked for that [narrative]. I mean there's another conversation about role models and women's sport and putting that responsibility on female athletes to blaze the trail and to be a role model etc.

Simply put, these journalists' views suggest that there can be instances where the representations of women racing drivers are over-sold to either engage with the reader or gain the interest of the sports desk which can distort representations and expectations of the women racing drivers. Furthermore, these views suggest that, on occasion, women racing drivers who may be considered 'average' in the motorsport field when compared to their male peers, receive far more media focus than an equivalent male peer, due to them being one of only a few female drivers. This places them out of the general motorsport doxa, and the intensification of the coverage positions them as extraordinary when their performance may not be. This finding is essential in understanding media representations of women racing drivers and sportswomen as it highlights how representations can and are manipulated to increase coverage from a producer's viewpoint. Further research on the extent and conditions for such over-selling in representations should be conducted to understand this phenomenon in greater detail.

The notion that articles may exaggerate the achievements or over-sell women in the sport was also held by some drivers. For example, Racing Driver G suggested that the reporting of women racing drivers can appear distorted due to the preconceived expectations and stereotypes of women in the sport:

I guess they think that we've done amazing if we were in the top five, whereas if a bloke were in the top five, he'd just be fifth loser, or fourth loser or whatever. I think we always get built up a bit more than what we are because they don't expect us to be any good. I think they honestly expect a woman to come last... They just expect you to be at the back, when you're not at the back they say, "she's just incredible". But, really, you're not at all. Like most women you speak to will say when you put on your helmet and you're just the same as everybody else. So, I don't know why they think when you've got fifth that you're amazing "well done that's incredible" [be]cause it's not— you're still only fifth.

Moreover, almost all the women interviewed felt that the majority of the coverage given to women racing drivers was due to their gender rather than their sporting performance. For example, Racing Driver B stated, "I think we get more coverage 'cause we are females in a male-dominated sport. I'm pretty sure that's the only reason we get approached in the first place." Likewise, Racing Driver D said, "I feel it can be a bit too focused on the fact that they're female rather than talking about their achievements, which I guess is to be expected, 'cause there are not many women in motorsport". From these interviews with the women racing drivers there seems to be the suggestion that despite there being some frustration with the focus of coverage there is a double bind, whereby they have accepted that to get coverage there is an expectation their gender will be the main focus.

A couple of the women racing drivers felt that the media attention they receive because of their involvement as a woman in the sport can be detrimental towards their relationships within the motorsport community. Racing Driver C recalled hearing male racing drivers questioning the coverage given to women in the sport:

I do hear a lot of "Well she's all over the news" and "she's all over the press, but she hasn't won anything. She's slow and she's rubbish". And like "these lads have done better, but why is this person featuring so highly?"

Racing Driver B described similar tensions that she had experienced which had resulted from the increased coverage women racing drivers received compared to male peers: "I know that it frustrates a lot of young male drivers. Like I am at the same level as them and I get more publicity than they do, not because I'm good or better than them, because they are the ones winning". These concerns are similar to those raised by women racing drivers in the study conducted by Matthews and Pike (2016, p. 1546). Their participant Kay cautioned against future coverage focusing on aspects other than performance saying that it could be "damaging for women to be pushed forward beyond their talents" thereby creating issues within the sport including resentment from other participants (Matthews and Pike, 2016, p. 1546). The friction over coverage identified in this current research suggests that women racing drivers' gender capital in newspaper reporting is advantageous as it is held in greater esteem than that of male racing drivers. This challenges the field's doxa as male racing drivers may be concerned that their patriarchal position in media coverage, and to some extent the sport, is at risk from the women racing

drivers. Thus, this resentment from male racing drivers towards the women could result in the achievements of women racing drivers being undermined by male racing drivers and further increased tension.

Furthermore, the positioning of women racing drivers in the media as exceptional can have implications on expectations of women racing drivers competing in the sport. Racing Driver A explained that although she felt representations of her in the media were positive, such attention simultaneously placed more pressure on her to perform: “All of a sudden, it’s like shit, I’m in front of my home crowd and I can’t fuck this up. It’s good because you get put on a pedestal but in the same breath it puts so much more pressure on your shoulders”. This view was shared by some of the other women racing drivers. Moreover, several women racing drivers described that when they stepped out on track, they were racing for all of womankind and that if they crashed or were involved in an incident, they felt that it would provide a reason for men to argue that women should not race. For example:

I put a lot of pressure on myself to be better than average all the time. And when I am out on the grid, if I qualify middle of the pack I am fuming. I am like what have I done? What can we do to improve the car? Do I need to [do] this [or that]?... So, I am very hard on myself, and I guess I do think that everybody has high expectations of me. I think I’m so frightened that someone will turn around and say, ‘a typical woman driver’. I think that honestly [is] in the back of my mind.

(Racing Driver G)

Furthermore, Racing Driver D explained the differences in expectations of performances that women racing drivers experience compared to their male peers:

Men make mistakes all the time but that’s fine. But as a woman I feel sometimes there’s more pressure on me to do well because I’m like if I don’t do well, it’s like “well women can’t drive”. And I feel like I’m not just doing it for myself I’ve got to try and do well to represent and show that we [women] can do it.

(Racing Driver D)

Racing Driver D added that “I just put it to the back of my mind” while driving. Racing Driver C took a different viewpoint as she said, “I don’t think it sets any expectations”. The divergent attitudes held by the women racing drivers highlight the heterogeneity of the women racing drivers’ experiences. The feeling expressed by some of the women interviewed—that they felt they carried the ‘weight’ of their gender—reflects

the views found in recent research about American women racing drivers (Kochanek *et al.*, 2021). Similar to my research, Kochanek *et al.* (2021) found that women racing drivers felt that their actions were seen as setting a group precedent and blame for mistakes was often framed as a result of their gender. Thus, as a result of this current study's findings I suggest that the doxa of motorsport is somewhat similar in the UK and the USA. Further, this research has highlighted that although the representations of women racing drivers created by journalists may not be intended to place constraints on women racing drivers, they do so as they create expectations and assumptions which some drivers felt could be used to marginalise them in the sport.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

Although women racing drivers are represented as *others* in British newspapers (see Chapter 5), this chapter has shown that they are simultaneously presented as 'extraordinary and exceptional women'. That is, women racing drivers are heralded and celebrated for their participation in the sport. This narrative was constructed in British newspapers using four themes: (1) a focus on the history of women racing drivers' involvement in the sport, (2) 'the first woman to', (3) trailblazers, and (4) role models. This chapter has shown that reporting women racing drivers as *others* is complex; *othering* can promote women racing drivers in the sport as well as marginalise them.

Previous research has provided only a limited understanding of the complexities of the coverage of women racing drivers. Therefore, this research which included interviews with journalists has deepened the understanding of why coverage is the way it is. The framing of the women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional can now be attributed not only to how women racing drivers' *othered* position in the sport is viewed, but also as a technique used by journalists as they believe it helps to engage, educate, and entice readers. Importantly, this narrative was also used as a means to 'sell the story' within their news organisations. As previously discussed, due to the limited number of women racing in the top echelons of the sport (see Chapter 4) and British newspapers' preference for reporting on F1 (Robeers, 2019b), journalists suggested that framing women racing drivers as

extraordinary and exceptional helped to sell the story to their editorial teams. Furthermore, the findings of this research have drawn attention to the power that both editors and racing correspondents hold over how and whether women racing drivers are reported on in newspapers, reflecting Bourdieu's argument that a journalist "holds sway over the mass media and ... thus has power over every kind of symbolic capital (the power of 'making or unmaking reputations')" Bourdieu (1991, p. 281 n34). Additionally, this research has shown the importance of a journalist's habitus and values in the desire to report on women racing drivers.

Importantly, this chapter has considered both the benefits and the negative implications of such narratives on women racing drivers. For the women racing drivers interviewed, there was a duality in the representations. Although they could see the benefits of the narratives for encouraging future generations into the sport, they also had some concerns that such representations reduced them to their gender. At the same time, they felt such reporting had the potential to place additional pressure on them while they were racing as they became de facto representatives for their entire gender. Overall, however, there was a feeling that the coverage was beneficial in the long-term for the progression of women in the sport.

The next chapter explores how coverage of women racing drivers has changed between 2010 and 2020 and draws upon the views of both women racing drivers and journalists on why these changes have occurred. Furthermore, the following chapter draws on the hopes of journalists and women racing drivers for the future media coverage of women racing drivers and their predictions of what shape this might take.



## **Chapter 7. The Race to the Chequered Flag: Are we seeing a shift to more equitable reporting of women racing drivers?**

### **7.1. Introduction**

It's not a man's world anymore.

(Susie Wolff quoted in *Daily Express*, July 4, 2014)

As the previous chapters have shown, the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020 are profoundly complex and nuanced. During the period of analysis there was evidence of change both in the amount of coverage and the discursive journalistic practices used to report on women racing drivers. This chapter focuses on these changes observed in the media analysis and draws upon the reflections and opinions of the interviewed journalists and women racing drivers to understand from their perspective why these changes have occurred. It also positions this research in the context of the greater sporting field and wider society. The findings suggest that the coverage of women racing drivers is starting to become more equitable, with Wolff's words above being more relevant now than ever before.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first outlines four broad themes identified during the interviews with journalists and women racing drivers that account for the changes in the amount of coverage given to women racing drivers in British newspapers (observed and outlined in Chapter 4). The second section focuses on changes in the discursive journalistic practices used to report on women racing drivers, in particular those that align the reporting of women racing drivers with that of men. Finally, the chapter concludes with the thoughts of women racing drivers and journalists on the future of coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers.

### **7.2. Reasons for changes in the amount of coverage given to women racing drivers.**

As identified in the quantitative investigation (see Chapter 4) the amount of coverage in British newspapers given to women racing drivers increased significantly between

2010 and 2020, albeit in a non-linear manner (see Figure 4). This section draws on the opinions and views of the interviewed journalists and women racing drivers to ascertain their reasoning as to why the volume of coverage changed during the sample period. The four main reasons for the changes were identified in the interviews as: (1) growing interest in women's sport and sportswomen, (2) changes in motorsport, (3) the rise of the WSeries, and finally (4) social media and experience sharing.

### **7.2.1. Growing interest in women's sports and sportswomen**

The most common explanation given by the interviewees for the increased coverage of women racing drivers was there being a growing acceptance and interest in sportswomen and women's sport in society more broadly. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, it has been argued that the past decade (2010 to 2020) has seen some positive changes in the cultural acceptance and perceptions of sportswomen and women's sport (YouGov, 2021), leading to a "real and growing demand for women's sport in the UK" (WST, 2018). Moreover, in recent years there has been a revitalised awareness of feminism in society and a rise in feminist activism. This renewed feminist engagement and (re)emergence of activism of young women in Britain (Chamberlain, 2017) is in stark contrast to the years before (1990s to early 2000s) where society was seen to be in a period of post-feminism where feminism was believed to be redundant and feminists were portrayed with negative stereotypes (McRobbie, 2009).

Many of the women racing drivers interviewed attributed the changes in the coverage of women competing in the sport to these shifts in the general coverage of sportswomen, for example:

There is more focus on women's sport in general over the past 10 years, as there has been a lot of amazing [female] athletes.

(Racing Driver D)

I think there has been a push on females in sport. And as a rule, people are focusing, I think, they [the media] are trying to get it [coverage] more equal, aren't they, to be fair.

(Racing Driver F)

Echoing these views, Racing Driver H also felt that "there's kind of a big push on women's sport", which has helped to bring focus on women in motorsport. Likewise,

this change in women's sport coverage was also noted by all of the interviewed journalists. Journalist C explained that there was a "very strong movement of upping diversity" across sports and that "we're all very lucky that every sport is doing it" as she felt it was reflected in motorsport. Likewise, Journalist E reflected on the current volume of coverage of women's rugby and football, and the diversity of women's sports that are now being covered. Focusing on women's cricket, he said:

I was listening to the BBC the other day and they were covering a women's Big Bash event in Australia. Now that would have been unheard of, even five years ago, I mean unthinkable! I think there has been a fundamental shift in the last five years towards media organisations being more willing to cover women's sport across the board.

(Journalist E)

Significantly he did not believe that before 2016 sportswomen were given the coverage that they are now receiving. This period of change in coverage for sportswomen in general was also identified by several other interviewees. Specifically, two of the interviewed journalists said that they believed that the 2015 Women's Football World Cup was the turning point in coverage of sportswomen in British newspapers:

I think what you had in around 2015, 2016 was an increased awareness across the board that women's sports coverage was not good enough or that there wasn't enough at all...I think that coincided with the Women's Football World Cup, so England got to... gosh this is testing my memory. I think they got the quarter or semi-finals, anyway they got quite far. And I think that in hindsight it sparked a conversation around like why are we not covering this more? Obviously, it would have a knock-on effect across the board [in sport].

(Journalist A)

I think it comes off the back of the Women's [2015 Football] World Cup, which was um, crikey when was it, a few years ago. So, the Women's [Football] World Cup was very popular, and I think that sort of pricked everyone's interest in the sense of, you know, football is very popular in terms of the men's game and the coverage it gets is wall-to-wall.

(Journalist B)

Many of the interviewed journalists also felt that a consequence of the increased interest in sportswomen was due to a progressive shift in the approaches and attitudes of newspapers as they felt their newspapers were more receptive to, and active in, covering sportswomen, for example:

Because of an increased interest in women's sport across the board, media organisations need to reflect this, and they are now aware of the need to do that. So, my newspaper for example is very positive and wants to act enthusiastically to cover more women's sport.

(Journalist E)

What is more, as previously mentioned in Chapter 6, the journalists felt that the growing interest in women's sport and sportswomen had resulted in the attitudes of gatekeepers (such as editors and the sports desk) becoming more inclusive towards sportswomen, which in turn helped to increase coverage of women racing drivers. Additionally, several journalists highlighted that they had seen structural changes in newspapers for example, more women's sport sections, introduction of women's sport beats and more women sports journalists. These changes identified by the journalists add to the findings of Laucella *et al.* (2017) and Sherwood *et al.* (2017) who identified similar trends within sports journalism in general. What these examples suggest is that the change in reporting was not spontaneously instigated by the newspapers. Rather, the findings of this research show that this shift occurred in reaction to changes seen in broader society (increased interest in and more positive attitudes towards sportswomen) making coverage of women racing drivers more advantageous for newspapers. Therefore, the increased coverage of sportswomen, including women racing drivers, was the result of the realisation within papers' editorial and managerial teams that there was an opportunity to increase newspaper sales, encourage new readers, and bring new lines of revenue to the newspaper.

Not only have the journalists interviewed pinpointed the mid 2010s as the turning point for coverage of sportswomen. The period has also been identified in both non-academic literature (such as Anstiss, 2021) and academic literature (such as Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021) as a decisive moment in the women's sporting movement in the UK. However, there was a feeling among interviewees that the change in motorsport coverage occurred slightly later. For example, Racing Driver A stated that the change in women racing drivers' coverage occurred sometime after 2015: "I would say [it was] probably around 2017". Likewise, Journalist E felt that the change in the coverage of women racing drivers was "totally noticeable in the last three to five years". He added that change was even more evident since the "WSeries started three years ago" (the

impact of the WSeries is discussed in greater detail in part 3 below). This delayed change in coverage of women racing drivers could have been due to the lack of women racing drivers in the top echelons of the sport during that period, 2016-2018 (see Chapter 4 for further detail of women racing driver participation in international racing series). It appears from the accounts of the journalists that the increased interest in sportswomen and women's sport had changed the media landscape (and doxa), a point also suggested in other recent research (see Sherwood *et al.*, 2017). Thus, in 2018 when women were more visible in the top echelons of motorsport, British newspapers were not only prepared to report on them in a way they had not before, due to shifts related to the success of women in other sports, they were also willing to so.

### **7.2.2. Changes in motorsport**

In addition to the general changes in the attitudes towards sportswomen and women's sport, many of the interviewees suggested that there were specific changes in motorsport, which had contributed to the increased coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers. As previously discussed, although women have been able to compete alongside men in motorsport, the sport has been very much seen as a 'boys' club' (FIA, 2020c). Academics have argued that the historical associations between men and the race car have become entrenched over time with the culture of motorsport being highly masculinised (see Scharff, 1991; O'Connell, 1998; Sloop, 2005; Pflugfelder, 2009) and even compared to a fraternity (Shackleford, 1999). In turn, this resulted in women racing drivers being seen as outside of the norms of the field (Pflugfelder, 2009; Matthews and Pike, 2016), a phenomenon this research found to still be present in contemporary reporting of women racing drivers (see Chapter 5) and something that all of the interviewees (women racing drivers and journalists) were acutely aware of.

There was a general feeling among the interviewees that motorsport had become more inclusive towards women, resulting in (a) more women participating in the sport, (b) greater desire by the sport to highlight those women participating within it and (c) more opportunities for women in the sport to progress, which all ultimately helped to increase the coverage of women in the media in recent years. Racing Driver E explained she had seen an increased awareness towards women in the

sport over the past five years: “I think things have been getting better over the years. I think it’s more positive now. I think there’s been a lot more awareness in—definitely over the past five years—of getting more women into motorsport”. Likewise, Racing Driver H felt that motorsport was on the “right path” indicating that improvements had been made. She went on to say: “These things take time; they take a whole generation and I’m really excited to see the next generation who are being born now how the changes in the sport will affect them.” This optimism was felt among all the women racing drivers about the changes they had seen in the sport.

Several of the interviewed journalists also expressed the view that there were changing attitudes towards women racing drivers within the sport. Journalist C suggested that: “Perhaps it’s more acceptable now for a woman to be a racing driver and people are encouraging them”. Journalist D felt the sport had started to move away from its boys’ club mentality saying, “I think it’s probably got better in recent times”, adding that the increasing number of women in the sport had helped to drive this change. Journalist B explained that he had seen changes in the sport towards women— “like sport, F1 [FIA Formula One World Championship] is changing”—but he added that “there does tend to be a reluctance to try stuff outside of the box”, and that as a result “F1 was slow to react in picking a female driver”. Journalist E also expressed a note of caution, saying that “it’s going to take decades” before women are seen and reported in the same way as men in motorsport.

There was also a sense from the interviews that the trend towards increasing diversity in motorsport was in reaction to changes outside of the sport. Racing Driver H explained, as with the newspapers’ attitudes towards sportswomen in general, changes in motorsport were due to “a cultural shift in society”. She added “if there was no kind of push for females and equality, there would be no push for it in motorsport. I think it’s definitely kind of come from society rather than motorsport in my opinion.” This suggests that the participants felt that the changes in motorsport were reactive, as the sport’s stakeholders had started to realise that to be relevant in society and maintain capital in the sporting field, the sport needed to align itself (doxa) to becoming more inclusive of women.

In addition to changes in attitudes towards women in motorsport, all interviewees mentioned initiatives in motorsport that had been created to increase the

participation of women in the sport as a factor for the increased coverage, these included: the WSeries (the impact of which is explored in greater depth in the following section), Dare to Be Different, FIA Girls on Track UK, FIA Women in Motorsport Commission and Formula Woman (both the original and relaunched competition). Racing Driver F used the example of Girls on Track to explain how participation had increased: “I think it has helped cos it has attracted a lot of girls. When you do stuff like that you need to get them as young as possible.” Journalist C also described the importance of such initiatives in the sport:

There are organisations that are set up now as well as the WSeries to encourage them [women]. There was Dare to Be Different, the FIA Women in Motorsport Commission, things like that. There’s a lot of people out there encouraging; it’s all part of the very strong movement of upping diversity [in motorsport].

Likewise, Journalist D explained “there is a big drive to capitalise on that [women in the sport] and get more girls and women into motorsport and there’s some really good organisations promoting that.” Clearly, none of the interviewees felt that these motorsport initiatives would have been instigated without the general positive shift in attitudes towards women’s involvement in the sport. Moreover, the initiatives were seen as a recognition of the need for equality in the sport. Indeed, as Bourdieu (2001, pp. 41-42) states, the possibility of changing the doxa of a field is only possible “through radical transformation of the social conditions of the production of the dispositions that lead to the dominated to take the point of the dominant”. Thus, for *real* change to occur in the doxa of motorsport it requires a desire from men to recognise the inequalities experienced by women and change the field, which appears to be occurring.

However, it is important to recognise that despite the evident progression towards making motorsport more equitable, there was also a recognition among the interviewees that there was still “a long way to go” (Racing Driver G). Likewise, Journalist B was keen to point out that despite the progression of women in motorsport as racing drivers and in other roles, such as engineers, the sport is not as far ahead in gender progression as other sports, e.g. football and that the change was not happening “at the same pace”. Many of the women racing drivers also highlighted gendered issues within the sport that were still prevalent. In addition to funding and sponsorship, the issues they raised included: lack of event facilities for

women, such as toilets at rally stages; ‘best woman’ awards (as previously discussed); stereotypical views of women; and incidents of unwanted male attention. Therefore, although there appears to be some progression in motorsport towards gender equality, which has aided the increase in coverage of women in the sport, there are still vast differences between opportunities and experiences for men and women in the sport that need addressing.

### **7.2.3. *The rise of the WSeries***

The WSeries was a recurrent theme in the interviews when exploring why coverage had increased for women racing drivers. The majority of the interviewees considered the creation of the WSeries to have been a game changer in the reporting of women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020. As previously noted in the quantitative analysis (Chapter 4), the WSeries was the second most reported racing series in the articles about women racing drivers, and the WSeries Champion Jamie Chadwick was the third most reported woman racing driver in the articles about women racing drivers. Furthermore, 64% of the articles written about her were categorised as ‘performance’ reporting (see Chapter 4). Additionally, the inaugural year of the WSeries (2019) had the greatest number of articles (83) about women racing drivers in the sample period –26 more articles than in any other year in the sample. In the interviews, the series was regarded by many of the participants as a driving force for several of the changes seen in the reporting, including the increase in overall coverage given to women racing drivers between 2018 and 2020 and the increase in the prevalence of reporting on women racing drivers’ performance (see the following section in this chapter for greater detail).

The importance of the series in the coverage of women racing drivers was repeatedly raised by members of both the interviewed groups, for example:

I think definitely in the past three to four years the WSeries has massively increased just the kind of coverage we can do.

(Journalist A)

In relation to specifics on perceptions or how things are portrayed in the media [in relation to women racing drivers]. I think when you look into it, the WSeries has brought this to the forefront. I’m of the opinion that the WSeries is actually pretty good.

(Journalist D)



I think that it helped massively, [even though] it hasn't been publicised as much as it probably should have been. But at the same time, it's still a growing baby and it is just going to get bigger with more and more people getting interested in it.

(Racing Driver A)

Moreover, there was a sense that the WSeries, in which women race in single seater cars, had helped to legitimise women as racing drivers. Journalist C noted that the series was “not perfect by any means” and that the series had “not broken the glass ceiling totally yet, but it is getting there”.

A point that several of the interviewees made was that the formation of the WSeries was not without controversy due to its radical approach. Within the motorsport community there were, and still are, divisions in relation to whether a sport that allows men and women to race alongside each other should also have a sex-segregated series (Howe, 2022). As noted in Chapter 5 where the sex-segregation of the sport was discussed, the reactions to the introduction of the series that were reported in the media were highly emotive and nuanced. The debate surrounding the formation of a women-only space (WSeries) in an otherwise integrated space (motorsport) is reflective of debates that exist in wider society surrounding women-only spaces (Lewis *et al.*, 2015). Several of the interviewed women racing drivers explained that they initially had mixed feelings about the WSeries. However, it is worth noting that all of the women racing drivers interviewed saw the WSeries in a positive light, an opinion not held by some women in the sport (White, 2021). Summarising the tensions in the sport about the series, Racing Driver C explained:

We've got the WSeries which was seen [as] kind of err... we're not sure of this—all the women in motorsport were not sure about it—as it was not what we wanted. We don't want segregation. Actually, we were all very sort of—not turning our noses up at it—but were very sceptical of what it was gonna do. Whereas actually it has given the top drivers in this country a real chance and it's giving them a platform. I say, I hope that off the back of this [series] these girls will be given a bit—not so much a leg up—but just a chance and an opportunity to prove themselves. Okay, they're racing against each other, but I'd like to think that it's giving them a platform.

A key point that many of the women racing drivers made was that despite their initial objections to the series it had created an awareness in wider society about some of the issues they faced. Moreover, Journalist A explained that the controversy around the series was beneficial for the coverage of women racing drivers:

It was controversial when it was started which I think in a backwards way, in hindsight, helped because it meant that editors were interested in it because it was being talked about and it was controversial, with people arguing that it shouldn't exist, and female racing drivers were saying they didn't want it. All of this makes it a good story.

Ultimately the debate around the series added to the media coverage providing more exposure and articles on women in the sport as it fulfilled many of the criteria of newsworthiness (Gee and Leberman, 2011; Harcup, 2021; Marques and Mont'Alverne, 2021) and tallied with the desire for more coverage of sportswomen. Additionally, the WSeries was seen by both Journalist C and Journalist E as a vehicle for journalists to become aware of and interact with women racing drivers they otherwise would not have. All of the journalists described the importance of developing relationships with women racing drivers and how these relationships have led to both more articles about those drivers and a desire from the journalist to stay engaged in the women's careers. All the journalists explained that they had been able to develop relationships with the women racing drivers involved in the series as there was an openness and willingness to engage with the media and share their stories, a stark contrast to the experiences they had with male drivers in F1. Moreover, the journalists said how proactive the WSeries organisers had been in engaging with them and reaching out to tell the stories of the drivers. What the WSeries appears to have done is to create a link between women racing drivers and journalists and provide a new racing series that can be written about which has increased newspaper coverage. Similarities can be drawn with the findings of Trunečka (2022) who found that Czech athletes, from a variety of sports, preferred to be interviewed by journalists who had built a relationship with them, however little research has explored how relationships between journalists' and sportswomen influence coverage.

Therefore, as evident in the examples above, the WSeries was seen to fundamentally change the amount and type of coverage that women racing drivers received between its launch in 2018 and the conclusion of this study in 2020 (see the next main section for greater detail). According to Howe (2022), the WSeries could be seen as a vehicle for further *othering* women in the sport by reinforcing notions that women cannot drive to the same level as men, however she was hopeful that the series could advance female participation in the sport. The findings

of this research suggest that the first season of the competition in 2019 has gone some way to reducing the stereotypes of women racing drivers as they were reported as legitimate athletes and their ability to race alongside men was positively framed by the British newspapers. Future coverage of WSeries needs to be continually reviewed to understand whether the series is creating lasting changes and whether the relationship between the media and the series remains as positive as the findings of this research suggest. Furthermore, future research should also examine the media representations of Extreme E in which, unlike the WSeries, men and women race in the same cars against each other (this series is only briefly touched upon in this thesis, as it had not started during the data collection period).

#### ***7.2.4. Social media and experience sharing***

Finally, the role of social media, and a general increased willingness of women racing drivers to share their experiences in general were identified in the interviews as significant contributory factors for the increased coverage of women racing drivers in recent years. Most of the interviewed women racing drivers shared this view. It is also worth noting that all of the interviewed women racing drivers explained that they preferred to receive news about motorsport online, with social media being the most common way. There was a belief that social media had enabled women racing drivers to share their experiences and journeys more readily. Racing Driver A felt the momentum in the interest in women racing drivers had created a circular effect which resulted in more women “sharing more about what they do as drivers”, which in turn created more interest in women in the sport. In her view, this led to an increase in the coverage of women racing drivers in the media. Many of the other women racing drivers echoed this sentiment, describing how social media allowed women drivers to portray their story and be seen. They also suggested that they felt there was less negativity in how stories were framed on social media articles compared to traditional newspaper coverage, which was attractive to the women racing drivers. Racing Driver D explained how she felt that social media might have played a part in the increase of coverage in newspapers:

Maybe social media plays a bit of a part in it to be honest. Because obviously, you know, even back in 2010<sup>39</sup> I don't think Instagram was even a thing. So, I think now women have more control over portraying themselves and then people do have interest in it which then you, obviously, will then garner media interest. If someone is rallying and putting it on Instagram and they've got 20,000 followers, then you know the two are kind of intrinsically linked. So, I think social media gives people the opportunity to promote themselves more, and I guess the internet in general as well. It gives people the opportunity to kind of promote themselves and contact various publications and put themselves out there more.

These views reflect recent research by Geurin (2017) who suggests that sportswomen use new media to connect with each other and provide an authentic representation of themselves. Social media can also provide sponsorship opportunities (Geurin, 2017). The interviewees' comments in relation to social media appear to support Bruce's (2016) notion of 'our voice', as it enables women racing drivers to shape how they are represented. However, further research is warranted to examine the way and to what extent social media has influenced the coverage of sportswomen as this was outside of the scope of this current study. Additionally, given that research has found significant amounts of abuse directed at sportswomen on social media (Grey *et al.*, 2020; Toffoletti *et al.*, 2022), further research is needed to examine the experiences, both positive and negative, of women racing drivers with social media.

Overall, the interviews identified that there were a multitude of factors that have aided in increasing the amount of coverage given to women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020. What these findings reinforce is the idea that sport can be seen as a mirror of society (Frey and Eitzen, 1991). Specifically motorsport, which has been traditionally seen as a male preserve (FIA, 2020c), has been forced to change its practices to reflect the changes seen in both society and the wider sporting field, so as to remain relevant and continue to hold capital in the fast-changing sporting market. Indeed Bourdieu (1993, p. 130) reminds us that "the principle of the transformations of sporting practices and consumption has to be sought in relationship between changes in the supply and changes in demand." As a result, these changes have benefited women racing drivers by increasing the coverage of

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<sup>39</sup> Instagram was launched in 2010, available only on Apple iPhones until 2012. Although when the app launched it had a rapid growth (1m users in 2 months) which at the time was significant, it took several years to build its users to the 1bn it had in 2018 (Richter, 2018).

women in the sport. However, it is important to remember that although the coverage of women racing drivers has significantly increased between 2010 and 2020, there is still a very long way to go before the coverage is on a par with that of male racing drivers.

### ***7.3. Changes in the discursive journalistic practices used in the reporting of women racing drivers.***

Not only has there been an increase in the amount of coverage devoted to women racing drivers but shifts in discursive journalistic practices have also made this coverage more equitable. Several academics have argued that there is evidence that media representations of sportswomen are becoming increasingly similar to those of sportsmen (Bruce, 2016; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021) and, as identified in previous chapters, similar changes were found in the analysis of articles undertaken for this research. Chapter 5 highlighted that although persistent gendered discursive journalistic practices remained in the reporting of women racing drivers, there was evidence of a reduction of some of these practices. For example, women racing drivers tended to be reported as physically capable of competing against men, and there was also an emerging change in reporting of the relationships of women racing drivers with compulsory heterosexuality not the being the only narrative. The following section explores other ways in which the coverage changed during the sample period or otherwise departed from the rules normally applied to sportswomen in the media (Bruce, 2016).

#### ***7.3.1. Performance reporting***

One of the most notable changes in the coverage of women racing drivers from 2010 to 2020 was an increase in the reporting of their racing performances; 43% of all the articles classified as 'performance' were published in the two-year period from 2019 to 2020. Significantly, the reporting of women racing drivers' performance started to mirror the that which has traditionally been associated with men, whereby reporting focuses on their on-track achievements and athletic skill (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). For example:

[Jamie Chadwick] started from pole position and held the lead for the opening 10 minutes of the 30-minute race. But she was under constant pressure from compatriot and eventual race-winner Alice Powell and Finland's Emma Kimilainen, who passed her on successive corners. That put Visser on Chadwick's tail and the Dutchwoman overtook her with three minutes left after a breath-taking passage of action during which the pair made contact. With Visser third, Chadwick had to finish in the top 10 to secure the title. She nursed her car home to win the inaugural season of the all-female series by 10 points.

*(Daily Mail, August 12, 2019)*

Here the race is described as exciting, action-packed, and 'breath-taking' with the journalist providing a detailed account, rather than just summarising the final outcome, as was the case in early examples of performance reporting in the sample period. Another example of recent performance reporting of women racing drivers being aligned with that of men can be seen in *The Guardian's* (August 9, 2019) pre-race article:

The finale is the conclusion of a six-race season that began in May and presents a two-way fight for the crown between Britain's Jamie Chadwick and Beitske Visser of the Netherlands. Chadwick holds the advantage by 98 points to 85 after what has been a fiercely competitive fight. Chadwick has two wins and three podiums, with Visser taking one win, two podiums and two fourth places. A podium finish will clinch it for Chadwick.

Here the language and manner used to describe the 'fight' for the championship win are reflective of the race reports written when men are competing, for example:

FERNANDO ALONSO will have to battle past all his serious rivals to stand any chance of winning a third world title at today's Brazilian Grand Prix after a rainy qualifying session left him fifth on the grid. Nico Hulkenberg, of Williams, took an unexpected pole position, the team's first for five-and-a-half years, with the Red Bulls of Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber second and third, McLaren's Lewis Hamilton fourth and Ferrari's Alonso only fifth. It leaves the title fight finely balanced, with the most likely outcome seeing the destiny of the crown decided a week today, at the closing race in Abu Dhabi.

*(Mail on Sunday, November 7, 2010)*

The changes in the reporting of women racing drivers to include more performance reporting was noted by several of the interviewees.

I think people are writing about what's happening on track as well as what is happening off track, if you know what I mean. [Journalists are] not just saying "oh these are females" and "Jamie Chadwick does this and this". They're saying, "Jamie and Alice" and then you know, sort of "Emma and...". So, they

are reporting the actual action, which is what we want not just reporting that they are “all females, and they go motor racing”.

(Journalist C)

Here, Journalist C acknowledged that there is still an interest in the personal lives of women racing drivers (a point made in Chapter 5) a mainstay of reporting on sportswomen (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016), but she felt more of the on-track action was being reported. Likewise, Journalist D recounted a recent crash in the WSeries (outside of the sample period as it occurred in 2021) and commented on the manner in which the women racing drivers were reported on:

I think the signs are good because you know a month ago there was that horrible accident at Eau Rouge [a corner on the Spa-Francorchamps Circuit, Belgium] in the WSeries and I think there’s something to say that if that happened 10 to 15 years ago, some media, you know, tabloid media would be like “oh look at these, it’s because they were women that there was a massive crash and they went off at Eau Rouge”. Of course, it wasn’t [due to their gender], you know, you could have had some of the top F1 drivers in that situation in those conditions it would have gone exactly the same way, you know, due to the circumstances of the accident. It was just a combination of circumstances. The good thing about it was I didn’t see any of that [blaming the accident on their gender], and I’m not aware of any of that mentality at all. Which is a really good thing. You shouldn’t measure it like that, but you know there would have been a time when it [their gender and the accident] would have been a thing.

For him, the fact that women were reported in this manner rather than one that questioned their ability to race was a sign of progress, a point also made by Journalist C on the same incident, indicating change in how women racing drivers were being reported on by the media. During the data analysis, it was found that when women had been involved in accidents their gender was not raised as a contributory factor. The risk of the sport was often subtly woven into the articles, but this but this has also been found in articles covering serious accidents that involved men (Demers, 2018). Additionally, Journalist E stated that he felt that there were already changes in how race reports about women racing drivers were being written: “There is no need for that [performance reporting] to be based around anything like gender, it can just be ‘Powell was better through turn three, so she got into the lead through turn four et cetera’”. He went on to add that where this was not already occurring in coverage “that it could change quite soon” and in his view “it should be happening now”.

Increasingly, in the media analysis there was evidence of signposting for future races that women racing drivers would be competing in. It is worth noting that these articles not only reported the facts, but also created a sense of excitement and hype about the races. For example:

This weekend it's the final of the W-Series all-female racing championship at Brands Hatch. Jamie Chadwick, 21, from Bath is leading, 13 points ahead of Dutch driver Beitske Visser. Jamie needs to finish in the top five if Visser wins at Brands Hatch. If all goes to plan, she'll scoop the \$500,000 top prize.  
(*Daily Mirror*, August 8, 2019)

Both the peaks in performance reporting and signposting occurred in 2019. However, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic and the significant impact it had on sport in 2020 (especially women's sport, which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter) there was no way of ascertaining whether these were isolated incidents or the start of a trend. What was notable in the analysis of the articles was that despite the WSeries not being run in 2020 due to pandemic (Klein, 2020) and many other motorsport competitions also being suspended (Simmons and Lickorish, 2020) there was still some visibility of women racing drivers in the media, with 45 articles being published, which was more than in 2010, 2011, 2014, 2017 and only marginally lower than in 2015, 2016 and 2018. This suggests that there had been a shift since 2017, when there were no British women racing in the top echelons of the sport and the coverage of women racing drivers was at an all-time low, and in 2020 newspaper editorial teams considered articles on women racing drivers newsworthy, even when there were limited, or even no, racing opportunities for women.

The increase and changes seen in 'performance' reporting suggests that women racing drivers are starting to be seen as legitimate and "serious" athletes (Bruce, 2016, p. 367), and their racing is being deemed newsworthy. Increasingly, reporting on sportswomen in British newspapers appears to be moving towards focusing on their sporting performance (Bowes and Kitching, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021). As previously mentioned, a key factor in this change in coverage identified in this current study can be attributed to the formation of the WSeries in 2019. Unlike in the previous nine years, where women were racing alongside men (albeit in limited numbers), the WSeries created an opportunity to increase the visibility of women in the sport. Moreover, it enabled newspapers to



report on the races and debate the barriers towards their involvement or profile-building, rather than speculate on the future of women in the sport. Likewise, the launch of Extreme E in 2021 may have further increased this type of coverage by providing an opportunity for direct comparisons between male and female racers. Future research should examine the ongoing coverage of WSeries and that of Extreme E as these two series are taking such differentiating approaches to increasing the involvement and visibility of women racing drivers. If women begin to race in F1 regularly then research should also focus on whether the theme of performance continues in reporting in British newspapers. This may not be the case because, as Bowes and Kitching (2019, p. 17) state, there is a “double-edged sword in women’s sports coverage”. They found that when men were under threat from women in mixed golf “a prominent feature was the emphasis on and reinforcement of the socially constructed binary categories of men and women” in the coverage (Bowes and Kitching, 2019, p. 17). This points to the possibility that when women racing drivers succeed in F1, British newspapers may revert to gendered discursive journalistic practices to uphold the gender hierarchy in motorsport.

### **7.3.2. *Infantilisation***

The media has been found to infantilise sportswomen by describing them as ‘girls’ or ‘young ladies’, which positions them as less important than their male peers and reinforces the gendered hierarchy (Dashper, 2018). Within the media analysis for this research, there was a noticeable shift away from this practice. Although the sample for this research was not devoid of infantilisation, this was not the norm, occurring in just 17% of all articles about women racing drivers. Furthermore, the limited evidence of infantilisation diminished over the sample period with the majority—80% (n=65)—occurring before 2017 (see Table 22 for examples). However, it is worth noting that when the practice did it was across all types of newspapers (qualities, mid-markets, and tabloids). The relative lack of infantilisation found in this research is at odds with the research of Petty and Pope (2019) who found a tendency in their sample of British newspapers to still report on women football players as ‘girls’ or ‘ladies’. However, the relative lack of infantilisation seen in the current study is indicative of Bruce’s (2016) summarisation of the trends in the reporting of sportswomen that shows that this practice is older and less visible in sports media today. This is a point that Biscomb and Griggs (2013) also made,

as they found that in the main there was no evidence of infantilisation in their media analysis of women cricketers in British newspapers.

**Table 22.** Examples of infantilisation of women racing drivers in British newspaper headlines.

| <i>Example</i>  | <i>Newspaper and date</i>             |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 'F1 crash girl loses her eye'   | <i>Daily Express</i> , (July 5, 2011) |
| 'IT'S GIRL POWER'   | <i>The Sun</i> , (March 23, 2013)     |
| 'American dream unfolding for girl on the grid; Katherine Legge is undaunted by shadow over IndyCar as she makes history' | <i>The Times</i> , (January 18, 2012) |

*Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.*

There was evidence of infantilisation towards men in 36 of the articles where they were described as “boys”. Eight of the articles included reference to motorsport being a ‘boys’ club’. In nine of the articles ‘boy(s)’ was used by the journalists to describe male drivers who had been beaten by women, which could be seen as a way to trivialise the women’s success. However, it could also reflect the language used by the women to describe their male peers as this was the case in 13 of the articles where women were quoted saying ‘boys’ to describe their adult male peers.

There are several possible explanations for the limited infantilisation in the articles examined. One possible reason is that newspapers are being more conscious of their practices as alluded to in previous research (Sherwood *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the shift away from using infantilisation as gendered discursive journalistic practice is suggestive of an evolving doxa of newspapers that is more accepting of women racing drivers. This could be explained further by the changes in societal attitudes towards women’s sport, as detailed above. At the same time the minimal use of infantilisation of women racing drivers could be attributed to the integrated nature of motorsport and its reporting, as many articles reported on both men and women racing drivers. Therefore in these sex-integrated articles, if women were called girls journalists would then be implying that the men they were racing against were boys, which would be counter to the notion of male hegemony and doxic beliefs of the sport and media. However, it is worth noting that Bowes and Kitching (2019) found

in mixed golf competition infantilisation of female players occurred when male players repeatedly called the women 'girls', the men also reinforced in the media their hegemonic position by referencing their male position in the sport. This is a point to consider in the future when more women race and are successful in the top echelons of motor racing. Future research is needed to examine this phenomenon (relative lack of infantilisation) further in sex-integrated sports to determine if it is a feature of the reporting in these sports and if so, why this is the case these sports.

### **7.3.3. Gendered naming hierarchy**

In addition to the reduced use of infantilising language in the articles about women racing drivers, there appeared to be a shift away from the traditionally gendered naming hierarchy that, unlike with male athletes, described women in terms of their title and their first name (Bruce, 2016). Women racing drivers were referred to by their first names throughout the sample period. However, it is worth noting that in the latter years of the sample period, the majority of instances of first names being used occurred in articles outside of the sport sections. After the initial introduction, the use of first names for the drivers occurred in only 10.1% (49 out of the 479 articles about women racing drivers), with 45% of the occurrences in tabloid newspapers. Overwhelmingly, women racing drivers were referred to either by their full name or their surname. The limited use of first names in naming athletes seen in this research supports the recent research by Bell and Coche (2022), Biscomb and Matheson (2019), and Petty and Pope (2019) who all suggest that this practice has become largely obsolete in newspaper sports reporting. This finding also adds to the suggestion that newspapers have moved towards a greater adherence to established discursive journalistic naming practices (the male standard) and away from the ambivalence previously shown towards sportswomen.

Only 13 articles out of the 479 (2.7%) referred to women drivers by their civil title, i.e., Ms or Mrs. However, despite this practice being virtually eliminated, it was used as recently as 2020 when the *Daily Mirror's* (May 24, 2020) article in the sport section referred to rally driver Catie Munnings as "Ms Munnings". Another recent example was in *The Times* (May 6, 2018) where an editorial article in the news section that reported on the activism of the racing driver Leilani Münter referring to her as "Ms Münter". Despite these isolated examples, the findings of this research

add further evidence that this is a waning practice in British newspapers (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019).

A possible reason for why there is a change in the way women racing drivers are reported on could again be attributed to British newspapers reflecting the changing societal acceptance of sportswomen and women's sport. Additionally, there could be link between such reporting and the increasing trends of sex-integration and mixed sporting events<sup>40</sup>, whereby reporting of sportsmen and sportswomen are occurring in the same articles, resulting in more equitable treatment.

#### **7.3.4. National identity in reporting**

Previous research has highlighted an increasing tendency to report on the nationality of female athletes, a framing that had traditionally been associated with men not women (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). Although not a main focus of this research, subtle changes were found in how women racing drivers were reported on in terms of their national identity.

The reporting of the nationality of women racing drivers was a consistent theme in the coverage and was evident throughout the sample period and across all the newspapers. The national identity of the women racing drivers was often used as a descriptive feature of the driver. However, there were several instances where the nationality of the driver was not reported, this tended to be for well-known women racing drivers whose nationality had been previously reported on in the same newspaper on a different day. It can be argued that the apparently equal reporting of national identity in the case of women and men racing drivers suggests that motorsport is more progressive on this issue than other sports. Moreover, the enduring feature of national identity in the reporting of women racing drivers could be due to the form of nationalism that has been previously identified in motorsport (Schep, 2023), whereby it is important to identify the nationality of the women racing drivers to allow for positive representations of the home nation drivers in such a mediated global sport.

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<sup>40</sup> See footnote 34 in Chapter 5.

There were notable changes in the way that the nationality of the women racing drivers was reported on over the sample period (see Table 23 for examples), these findings tend to align with the trend described by Biscomb and Matheson that the reporting of nationality of sportswomen tends to follow the formula “name + age + nationality” (2019, p. 272). This appeared on the whole to be the case in reporting of women racing drivers. However, in the latter years of the sample there was a tendency for name and national identity to be reported first and then the age of the driver to be mentioned later on in the article. There was also evidence of the localised identities of the women racing drivers being reported, for example “Scottish born racer from Oban” (*The Sun*, February 28, 2020). According to Bowes *et al.* (2020), the reporting of localised identities of sportswomen further emphasises the importance of national identity reporting, and aids in legitimising female athletes.

**Table 23.** Examples of national identity in motorsport reporting of women racing drivers in British newspapers in 2012, 2015 and 2019.

| 2012  | 2015  | 2019  |
|---|---|---|
| 'Danica Patrick, the American racer' ( <i>The Times</i> , January 21, 2012)   | 'BRITAIN'S Susie Wolff, 32' ( <i>The Daily Mail</i> , November 5, 2015) | '21-year-old from Bath' ( <i>Mail on Sunday</i> , July 7, 2019)   |
| 'Ana Beatriz of Brazil, Simona de Silvestro of Switzerland and Katherine Legge of Guildford, Surrey.' ( <i>The Guardian</i> , May 29, 2012) | 'Brit Susie Wolff, 32' ( <i>The Sun</i> , June 24, 2015)                | 'Britain's Jamie Chadwick' ( <i>The Observer</i> , May 4, 2019)   |
| '32-year-old Spaniard' ( <i>Daily Mirror</i> , July 5, 2012)  | 'Spaniard Jorda, 26' ( <i>Daily Mirror</i> , February 27, 2015)         | 'BRIT Jamie Chadwick' ( <i>The Sun</i> , May 9, 2019)   |
| 'María de Villota, 32, from Spain' ( <i>The Times</i> , July 5, 2012)   | 'The 32-year-old Briton' ( <i>Daily Express</i> , November 5, 2015)     | 'Jamie Chadwick won the inaugural race in Hockenheim on Saturday after a dominant performance over the weekend. The 20-year-old Briton' ( <i>The Times</i> , May 6, 2019) |

Source: Data analysed from data collected 2020/21 from LexisNexis Academic.

There did appear to be a sense of pride in the reporting on British drivers, which could be seen as a way of positioning the women as national heroes. This was most evident in the recent coverage of women racing in the WSeries where there was a tendency of reporting the 'Brits' vs the rest of the field, e.g. "Not only did a British driver win, second place was scooped by Oxford's Alice Powell," (*The Sun*, May 9, 2019). Additionally, there was evidence in the coverage of journalists using metaphors of violence in descriptions of women racing drivers: "Britain's Jamie Chadwick will fight it out with Holland's Beitske Visser" (*Mail on Sunday*, July 29, 2019). Likewise, *The Guardian* (August 9, 2019) used similar language to describe the build-up to the final race of the WSeries 2019 season:

The finale is the conclusion of a six-race season that began in May and presents a two-way fight for the crown between Britain's Jamie Chadwick and Beitske Visser of the Netherlands. Chadwick holds the advantage by 98 points to 85 after what has been a fiercely competitive fight.

As previously discussed, motorsport is not structured in a nation vs nation format. Instead racing drivers drive for commercial teams (Henry *et al.*, 2007). However, symbols of nationality are present on the vehicles and drivers' race suits and sometimes helmet designs and both national flags and anthems are a key part of podium ceremonies. The evidence of references to national identity found in this research reflect the findings of Bowes *et al.* (2020, p. 435) who suggest that in British newspaper coverage "the national descriptors tie sportswomen to the nation, thus increasing their national significance and indicating that those who compete (and even better, win) for the nation are worthy of attention". Moreover, the inclusion of fighting language identified in the articles was reflective of the way in which male racing drivers were often discussed. As such it can be argued that these successful British women racing drivers' gender is disregarded and instead they are seen as embodiments of national values (Bruce, 2016).

Similarities to male racing drivers were also present in the way women racing drivers were described using regal and noble language to describe their sporting stature and achievements. For example, when Jamie Chadwick won the inaugural WSeries in 2019 she was often described as being "crowned" the champion. Similarly, Sabine Schimdtz was often referred to as the 'Queen of the Nürburgring'. In the same vein, the status of one racing driver was referred to in the reporting as divine: "If NASCAR

remains the god of US motor sport, Danica Patrick is the goddess” (*The Times*, October 18, 2011). Such language for women racing drivers appears to echo how male racing drivers were reported on in British newspapers. Male racing drivers were often crowned as champions and described as kings within the sport. This language tended to be used for men who were World Champions or victors of particular races (these tend to be races with long established history such as the Indy500, F1’s Monaco Grand Prix and 24hrs Le Mans).

The British monarchy is “integrally bound up with the idea of British identity” (Billig, 1992, p. xii); to some it is the epitome of Britishness. Within sports reporting it has been identified that drawing on images of Britishness through language associated with the monarchy is a way to reinforce and evoke notions of national identity in the United Kingdom (Maguire and Tuck, 1998). The use of regal language has also been identified in the reporting of sportswomen in British newspapers previously by Biscomb and Matheson (2019). One possible reason for the use of regal language in the description of motorsport and the racing drivers, could be an attempt by the newspapers to claim and emphasise the sport as British and thus foster notions of national identity to its readers. This claiming of motorsport as British could be due to the historical associations of motorsport and Britain (Henry *et al.*, 2007). The use of regal language for women racing drivers could suggest an acceptance of their position in the sport by the media as it indicates an equality in the language used to describe success in the sport, whereby the women’s achievements in reaching the top levels of the sport are considered to be as momentous as men’s achieving a world championship. It also fosters notions of these women being extraordinary in their accomplishments, especially when referred to as a Queen or goddess. It is also important to note the negative connotations that can be associated with the use of female royal positions as they can be viewed as subordinate to the male equivalents (e.g. a Queen is generally considered less powerful than a King).

It is important to note that the findings of this current research on national identity representations are limited as it was not the main focus. Therefore, further research is warranted to investigate this topic of national identity representations in the coverage of women racing drivers in greater detail. Moreover, as, and when more women racing drivers reach the top levels of the sport it will be important to

understand the role and impact that the national identity of women racing drivers has on the reporting.

#### **7.4. *Slipstreaming to the finish line: The future***

As identified in the previous chapters, there are still significant changes that need to be made in discursive journalistic practices, such as gender-marking and non-task related reporting before reporting can be considered equitable. This final section is divided into two parts. The first part looks back at the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact that this has had on the coverage of women racing drivers. Following this, the final part looks forward and explores the future of the coverage of women racing drivers in the media through the voices of women racing drivers and journalists.

##### **7.4.1. *The impact of Covid-19 on women racing driver's coverage.***

In early 2020, sport was, like much of the rest of the world, brought to a standstill due by Covid-19. For a brief period, this created an unprecedented dearth of content for sports media as there were no live sports events to be reported on (Deloitte, 2020). In the UK competitive elite sport was allowed to recommence from June 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 without spectators (Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport and Dowden, 2020). However, these were mainly men's sports with most women's sports being cancelled for that year (Department of Culture Sport and Media, 2020a). Although it will take some time to understand the long-term impact of the pandemic on sportswomen and women's sports, and the subsequent long-term effect this will have on coverage of sportswomen, there has been some research exploring the short-term impact of the pandemic on the media's reporting of sportswomen during this period (for example Black, 2021; Bowes, Lomax and Piasecki, 2021; Sadri *et al.*, 2021; Clarkson *et al.*, 2022; Symons *et al.*, 2022; Parry *et al.*, 2023). Although the project was developed in 2019 prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, the sample period included its first year and thus several observations can be drawn on its impact on the coverage of women racing drivers.

The opening race of the 2020 F1 season was cancelled due to the pandemic just two days before it was due to take place in March (F1, 2020c). Four days later Motorsport UK announced with "regret" that they were suspending all motorsport



activities in the UK in accordance with government guidelines (Motorsport UK, 2020c). Four months later, F1 and its two main feeder series, F2 and F3, were the first international sporting series to restart albeit with a reduced calendar and with all teams, media, and support staff subjected to stringent Covid-19 protocols (F1, 2020a). However, the WSeries' 2020 season remained cancelled, even though it was due to be a support series at several of the F1 Grand Prix (Klein, 2020). This imbalance which saw the all-women WSeries remain cancelled while the majority of racing series restarted reflects the wider sporting and social environment in which women's sports and services have historically been deemed less important than men's (Cooky, 2018a). In the UK, Motorsport UK's sanctioned racing did not restart until August 2020 with a drastically reduced calendar (MotorSport, 2020). This in turn impacted the opportunities for women racing drivers and their potential for coverage. As currently there are limited numbers of women racing in the top levels of the sport and women racing drivers tend to race in the grassroots and feeder series more than in main championships.

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, there was a 53.6% reduction in the reporting of women racing drivers from 2019 to 2020. However, the coverage of male racing drivers remained relatively consistent in 2020 compared to 2019. What is more, in the articles about women racing drivers in 2020 there were only 13 with the overall theme performance compared to 28 in 2019, with articles tending to examine in depth the experiences of women in the sport and the barriers they have experienced getting into the sport (not Covid-19 related). Recent research by Symons *et al.* (2022) on the impact of Covid-19 on the coverage of sportswomen found that, in a time when there were no sporting events to report on, women's sport still remained marginalised in sports media coverage. Moreover, they suggested that during this period sports journalists reverted to traditional sports content creation (i.e. the prioritisation of men's sport) and that the progress made in the coverage of women's sport prior to the Covid-19 pandemic was lost, with the media failing "to recognize the commercial potential of media coverage of women's sport" (Symons *et al.*, 2022, p. 14). This current study draws parallels with theirs, finding that the number of articles about women racing drivers significantly decreased from their 2019 levels. Further, the cancellation of the WSeries for the 2020 season, despite the continuation of the two series (DTM and F1) that it was due to support, adds to the

argument that during the Covid-19 pandemic women's sport was disregarded by sporting authorities and governing bodies (Department of Culture Sport and Media, 2020b; Clarkson *et al.*, 2022).

Staurowsky *et al.* (2020) found that during the Covid-19 pandemic there were dominant narratives of loss, uncertainty, and scarcity of women's sport in the media which they argued painted a picture of women's sport losing the momentum and progression it had made in the late 2010s and that the pandemic highlighted weaknesses in the organisation and management of women's sport. In contrast, Parry *et al.* (2023) identified some evidence that in British newspapers there was a shift in coverage and that despite the lack of football being played, reporting still occurred and focused around areas of concern and issues that female footballers generally experience, a point they deemed positive as they felt it was raising awareness. The findings of this research align with those of Parry *et al.* (2023). The coverage that occurred during the pandemic highlighted the issues and barriers that women racing drivers have experienced in order to raise awareness of these barriers and look towards the future for women racing drivers in the sport. These articles focused on the increasing numbers of women in the sport rather than suggesting they were losing momentum in their progression. Future research needs to examine the impact of Covid-19 on both women racing drivers' careers and progression, and the mid- to long-term impact on coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers. Furthermore, research needs to investigate the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on how news is consumed in the UK and how this has impacted the coverage of sportswomen throughout the pandemic and into the future.

#### **7.4.2. Predictions and hopes for the future coverage of women racing drivers**

Both the interviewed journalists and women racing drivers had a generally held hope for positive change in the future of coverage of women in motor racing, believing that equity with male racing drivers was possible, however they also acknowledged that there would be challenges along the way to achieve this. All of the women racing drivers hoped that the future of coverage about women racing drivers would be aligned to men, and ultimately their participation in the sport would be seen as the norm rather than the exception.

I would hope that everything would be moved on and everything in motorsport relating to women in 10 years' time is more streamlined and the norm. That's what I would expect, and so I would expect it to be and so questions [to women racing drivers] would change accordingly with the time.

(Racing Driver B)

I'd just like to see, and I hope that women are just written about in motorsport, and in general in terms of what they're doing, not just because they're female, but because of their achievements. And that they are given the opportunities to actually succeed... So, for me I'd like to pick up a newspaper and read about a girl that's done well in racing, karting, or somebody that's doing well in rallying.

(Racing Driver C)

I think in a way it would be to just make it part of the norm... At the moment it feels almost segregated the coverage, whereas I think it would be great to just incorporate them [women] into the general coverage.

(Racing Driver D)

I think it will be better in another five years, definitely. And then I don't think we'll be stereotyped as much because it will just be the norm [women racing in the sport] rather than at the minute when there's only you, you sort of do get singled out a little bit.

(Racing Driver E)

Evident here is the passion, dedication, and investment in the sport that these women all hold, and their strong desire for a positive future for women in the sport. What is more, it highlights the determination that these women have, as despite the doxa of the field, masculine domination and symbolic violence that has been enacted on them, they have persevered in the sport.

A poignant reflection that Racing Driver B made on the future of the coverage given to women racing drivers was that "you'd hope in 10 years' time it's not the same, if it is then what I'm doing now right now isn't working then". Change will take time, possibly years, a point made by several of the women racing drivers in the quotes above. Racing Driver A suggested that a shift in the coverage of women drivers would only take place after changes in both the sport and the media:

I just really hope that more happens in the future, that we're more respected as just drivers and get asked questions about the technical side of things because there's not enough of that now. The way it is going it will go that way eventually but not for a few years yet, cos it's still a boys' club. And as much as we want it to change its not going to change for quite some time, I don't think... There's so many things that need to be done from the media side of things to portray us in a better light without putting us in a box.

The desire for normalisation in the reporting of women racing drivers was a view not only held by the interviewed women racing drivers, but also all the interviewed journalists. For example, Journalist D stated “I think it will be good, I am quite positive about it [the future].” He suggested that initiatives like the FIA’s Girls On Track were helping to create change across the sport including the media. Like the women racing drivers, the interviewed journalists felt it would take years before there would be equity between the reporting of women drivers and their male counterparts. Journalist E explained “it won’t change in the near future because there aren’t enough [women racing drivers] to make it ordinary”.

Moreover, all the interviewed journalists felt that for coverage to become normalised it was “predicated on them [women] getting into F1 on a regular basis” (Journalist E). Journalist E added that, in his view, women racing in F1 regularly would increase the number of women “wanting to compete” which in turn would “move on” the coverage and how women are reported on. However, as much as regular participation of women in F1 was seen by all the journalists as the main way to significantly change and normalise coverage of women racing drivers, it was also recognised that for those future F1 women racing drivers the journey to normality would not be straightforward or easy. Journalist A described her view of the nuances in the future coverage of women racing drivers over the next 5 to 15 years as:

It’s quite hard to tell. I certainly would hope that we will see a regular female driver in F1 within 10 years. I’ll be kind of depressed if that didn’t happen. But I’ve also been around in this long enough to know to be like vaguely cynical and be concerned that it might not happen... Let’s say at the earliest, maybe five years, and then what you will obviously have for first couple of years is an adjustment period whereby the headlines for a long time will just be “There’s a woman in F1!”. You know, there will be a huge amount of scrutiny over, you know, about her races, what she achieves and how she’s doing. You can pretty safely assume she’ll be on the cover of Vogue or on the cover of GQ, you know and becoming probably similar to Dina Asher Smith and end up more than just a sports star. Be interviewed on breakfast TV all that kind of stuff. So, then I suppose you’re left with how long does it take for that to die down for her to then just be written about as part of the pack and as a driver in her own right? I mean of course the next bit is if she wins a season or a race. She will be the first to do that, so then that’s another whole ‘firsts’ sort of period of time. So, I think ten years is probably too soon to have done all of that and it to start being ‘normal’, particularly as I think 10 years is too soon to have *two* female drivers.

The other journalists agreed that the first woman to race regularly in F1 would likely endure a huge amount of scrutiny. Journalist D suggested that this would be “huge and possibly intolerable for some”. He went on to say that the woman:

Coming in on talent, merit, and anything else that brings the package together has to be super prepared from a psychological point of view. Because in my opinion the unprecedented and probably unfair pressure that will be on them.  
(Journalist D)

He added that most of this extra pressure will be from a media standpoint. What these statements highlight is that to achieve gender equality in coverage of motor racing, the women who lead the way into F1 could be regarded in some ways as sacrificial lambs to the slaughter, bearing the brunt of scrutiny for their gender in the media. However, there is a belief from those journalists interviewed that over time this scrutiny would subside and pave the way for more normalised coverage of women racing drivers, which was strongly desired by the interviewed women racing drivers.

Several of the racing drivers suggested that there were ways that journalists could make the coverage of women racing drivers more equitable, for example:

Write a race report, talk about the women, the one or two in the race without making quite such a big deal about it. So, yes, do the stand-alone pieces but also make sure that if there is a woman out there competing, they get a mention for what they have achieved.  
(Racing Driver D)

Alternatively, Racing Driver H suggested that when newspapers discuss possible racing drivers to fill vacant places on F1 teams, instead of using silhouettes of men, they could consider the possibility of the seat being filled by a woman. Another suggestion was to increase the diversity of the motorsport disciplines covered in newspapers:

Go out to grassroots motorsport events and just interview and do a one pager in a newspaper or article online. Just talk about it [grassroots] and get people interested in it. I think a lot of people don't know how to get into motorsport.  
(Racing Driver E)

In the same vein as Racing Driver E's comments, Racing Driver F stressed that journalists “need to do more research and cover more disciplines [...] I think they should broaden and not just concentrate on F1 which is male-dominated”. This hope

of the media covering more motorsport disciplines and increasing coverage of the sport's grassroots reoccurred throughout the interviews with women racing drivers regardless of their own discipline. However, as previously discussed, newspaper space and journalists' time is subject to "commercial diktat" (Journalist E), which results motorsport coverage in British newspapers being dominated by F1. Journalist B admitted that although he was always interested in reporting on good stories "I suppose we've got to stop being lazy and start digging as well" but he added that it worked "both ways" and that people need to "reach out to journalists" too. He added that he would like to attend more grassroots motorsport, but the demands of covering the major racing series meant that "I don't really have a chance to go to, you know, club meets or anything like that, but that's not that I wouldn't be interested in reporting it, if someone again had found something interesting, they should just say".

The communication between women racing drivers and journalists appeared to be an area that could be improved. As discussed above there appeared to be a genuine interest from journalists to hear stories from women racing drivers. Moreover, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the journalists highlighted how interactions with racers early in their career can help forge lasting relationships between the journalist and racing driver. However, women racing drivers' experiences of dealing with journalists varied extensively. Some found journalists were very responsive, others said they never heard back after making contact, while others expressed the assumption that they believed their story would not be of interest, so they did not contact any journalists in the first place. This was underpinned by a disconnect in the understanding of how such professional relationships could be instigated. While journalists believed it was easy for women racing drivers to contact them, some of the drivers said they were unaware of how to do so. What this research has found is that there needs to be a clearer dialogue between journalists and racing drivers on (a) what journalists want to hear about and (b) how racing drivers can contact them with such stories which will benefit all parties. A possible vehicle for this could be through journalists engaging with Motorsport UK or through organisations such as the BWRDC, the BRDC, or Girls On Track UK.

### **7.5. Conclusion: Are we seeing change?**

Overall, this chapter has highlighted that, despite women racing drivers being *othered* and marginalised in British newspapers, there do appear to be signs of progression in how they are represented. What was evident was that there were changes—both technological and societal—during the 2010s that facilitated an increase in the overall coverage of women racing drivers in British newspapers. The coverage of women racing drivers appears to have been positively affected by the wider changes in sport and society where women’s rights and their sporting success has been brought to the forefront of discussion. Moreover, the all-women WSeries, was seen by participants as a major contributor to changes in the coverage of women racing drivers, despite there being some concerns surrounding the formation of a women-only space in a sex-integrated sport.

In addition to understanding why journalists and women racing drivers believed there was more coverage of women racing drivers over the sample period, this chapter explored changes identified in the media analysis in the discursive journalistic practices used in the reporting of women racing drivers in addition to the changes previously identified in this research. Again, the WSeries was seen as an influencing factor for the shifts towards more equitable coverage as it provided an opportunity for performance reporting of women racing drivers. Furthermore, the findings of this research support recent research (such as Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021) that the coverage of sportswomen is starting to shift towards being more equitable, although further research is warranted.

Finally, the interviewees shared their hopes for the future coverage of women racing drivers. There was a general feeling that if the positive changes in the media coverage of women racing drivers identified in this research continued, there would be a beneficial increase in the awareness and visibility of women racing drivers in the sport. However, there was a consensus among the participants that for coverage of women drivers to become fully aligned with that of their male counterparts in terms of narratives and content in British newspapers, it required at least one woman to regularly race in F1. Significantly, several interviewees raised concerns that if a woman (or women) were to race in F1 regularly, they would be subject to

extensive focus the pressure of which could be intolerable. Therefore, despite the signs of positivity towards the way coverage of women racing drivers appears to be progressing, there is still a long way to go for it to be on a par with men in terms of the volume and narrative themes.



## Chapter 8. Race Debrief: Concluding thoughts

### 8.1. Introduction

Even after the race has finished, there's little time to relax.

(*The Sunday Times*, June 5, 2011)

As this research concludes, much like the end of a motorsport race weekend, it is important to take some time to review, evaluate and reflect on the processes and outcomes of the investigation, and to also look to the future. Therefore, this final chapter brings together and summarises the main findings and arguments of this research. It will also discuss the limitations of the research, proposes recommendations for journalistic practices and the motorsport industry, and provides suggestions for future research. I will then conclude with personal reflections on the research.

In this research, I have shown that women racing drivers in British newspapers were barely visible between 2010 and 2020, and this was most significantly evident when compared to their male peers, despite a percentage increase of 200% in the number of articles about them from 2010 to 2020. When women racing drivers were reported on, articles tended to (re)position them as *others* (outside of the accepted norms of the field). This *other* status was found to have been constructed through various discursive journalistic practices and narratives. Moreover, the representations of women racing drivers and the implications of such representations were shaped by complex interactions between fields (namely motorsport and media) and the individuals within those fields.

Before summarising the findings, it is important to revisit the purpose of this research. The research was guided by the central question: *How were women racing drivers represented in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020?* To be able to provide a rounded answer to this central question, several sub-questions were developed. These were:

- i) Did British newspaper coverage of women racing drivers change between 2010 and 2020, and if so, how?

- ii) What themes and discursive journalistic practices exist in British newspapers' reporting of women racing drivers, and have these changed over time?
- iii) Why are articles in British newspapers about women racing drivers written in the way they are?
- iv) How have women racing drivers personally experienced sports media representations throughout their careers, and has this impacted their participation within the sport?

To best answer the research questions outlined above, the research employed a mixed-method approach. Firstly, this research analysed six British print newspapers between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, qualitatively and quantitatively to understand how women racing drivers were represented. Further, semi-structured interviews with those involved in motorsport news production allowed for exploration of their rationales for how articles about women racing drivers were written. Finally, this research used interviews with women racing drivers to understand their experiences concerning media interactions and their perspective on the media's representations of women racing drivers. Theoretically, the research was grounded in feminist thinking and drew upon the work of Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) to interpret qualitative findings thematically. This allowed for an understanding of how the gender of racing drivers, specifically women, affects British newspaper coverage and content, and an exploration into the experiences of journalists and women racing drivers in relation to their agency and their interactions within the fields they occupy.

## **8.2. Summary of the research**

When taking the (qualitative and quantitative) findings together, a mixed picture emerges; on the one hand, women racing drivers were marginalised and *othered* through gendered discursive journalistic practices, narratives focusing on non-sporting aspects of their lives, and the relative lack of coverage afforded to them compared to their male peers. Yet, on the other hand, there were juxtaposed themes that heralded women racing drivers within the narrative of 'extraordinary and exceptional'. Alongside these positive themes there was evidence of emerging

trends towards greater equity in how women racing drivers were reported on in terms of article content and volume of coverage compared to men (the proportion of articles about women racing drivers grew from 0.7% of all articles about racing drivers in 2010 to 2.2% in 2020). Additionally, by conducting the interviews with journalists and women racing drivers, insights into the complexity of the interactions between sport and the media, which may have otherwise not been considered, were revealed thus allowing for the implications of such interactions to be explored.

The three main arguments that have been made throughout this thesis will now be recapitulated.

### **8.2.1. (1) *Women racing drivers are seen as others in British newspaper coverage***

At face value, motor racing stands apart from most sports as men and women can compete directly against each other, however, in reality this rarely happens, as the sport is dominated by men. The initial part of Chapter 4 highlighted how few women had competed in the top echelons of the sport<sup>41</sup> over the sample period, which mirrors previous research which has highlighted how few women compete in the sport (e.g. Scharff, 1991; O'Connell, 1998; Shackelford, 1999; Sloop, 2005; Charters, 2006; Cuneen *et al.*, 2007; Clarsen, 2008; Williams, 2014; Matthews and Pike, 2016). Additionally, this research found that there were significant inequalities in British newspaper coverage of women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020 in terms of both quantity and content of articles. Although previous research has identified marginalisation of women racing drivers in the media (see Sloop, 2005; Matthews and Pike, 2016; Tolvhed, 2017), this research has shown and expanded on this enduring feature beyond 2010. In this thesis I have argued that the way women racing drivers have been represented in British newspapers has positioned them as *others* and outsiders of the accepted ideals of the sport.

Firstly, evidence of *othering* women racing drivers in British newspapers was found in the quantitative examination of articles, which identified inequalities in coverage in terms of visibility (measured in numbers of articles). Articles about women racing

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<sup>41</sup> As articulated in Chapter 4, this was a selection of the top international and UK racing series, not an exhaustive list.

drivers were not evenly distributed across the sample period (see Figure 4) with two distinct peaks in the coverage (2012-2016 and 2018-2019). In the sample, there were no articles about women racing drivers on the front page of the sports sections. There was only one article on a newspaper's front page (*The Sunday Times*, June 21, 2020) that mentioned women racing drivers, but it was primarily focused on Lewis Hamilton's work on inclusion in motorsport, rather than a woman's racing performance. It is important to note that, although women racing drivers were more visible in 2020 compared to 2010, with a 200% increase in the number of articles about them (from 15 in 2010 to 45 in 2020), the media analysis showed unequivocally that women racing drivers remained virtually invisible in newspaper coverage compared to male racing drivers. Women were in, on average, only 1.4% of articles about racing drivers in 2010 and 2020 (0.7% and 2.2% respectively). The relative lack of coverage afforded to women racing drivers reflects the trends identified in the general coverage of sportswomen in British newspapers (see Godoy-Pressland, 2014b; Schmidt, 2018; Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). It is worth noting that the proportion of articles about women racing drivers compared to men racing drivers is lower than previously found in studies comparing newspaper coverage of sportswomen to that of sportsmen. The interviews with journalists suggested that the relative dearth of coverage was in part due to the lack of women racing in the top echelons of the sport, specifically in F1. This lack of women racing drivers competing in the sport creates a gender imbalance in the coverage of motorsport, which positions women racing drivers as inferior to their male peers, and ultimately frames them as *others* in the sport.

Another way in which women racing drivers were *othered* in newspaper coverage identified by this research was through the use of gendered discursive journalistic practices and narratives (see Chapter 5). These practices subtly questioned women racing drivers' legitimacy in the sport and positioned them as outside the doxa of the field. One significant example of how this occurred in newspaper articles was the assumption that the term 'racing driver' referred to a man, which resulted in women racing drivers being gender-marked as a point of difference. Furthermore, despite racing series' names tending to be gender neutral, the dominant focus on F1 (a space in which no women racing drivers competed during the data analysis period) in British newspapers represented motorsport in general as a male space. What

was also evident in the reporting was that articles tended to focus on elements outside a woman racing driver's sporting performance (only 19.8% of the articles examined focused on their sporting performance). Rather, focus was placed on their personal lives, their involvement in the sport (as women in a predominately male field), their physical attributes, and the issues of sex-segregation in the sport. The prevalence of such non-task-related content has been repeatedly described in scholarship as a means to reinforce the gender hierarchies of sport and media (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016).

The newspapers often also heralded women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional women by (1) a focus on the history of women racing drivers' involvement in the sport, (2) 'the first woman to', (3) trailblazers, and (4) role models. The admiring narratives surrounding women racing drivers in British newspapers is not a new finding (Matthews and Pike, 2016), however, this research has found the strongest evidence of this trend to date. At first glance, these apparently positive narratives can be seen to celebrate women racing drivers' involvement in motorsport and increase their visibility. However, I have argued that these representations also reinforce the *othered* status of women in the sport. This is because such narratives (re)position women racing drivers as transgressors to the established doxa of the motorsport field and as such highlights their *otherness*.

This research has provided insights into why gendered discursive journalistic practises occur in motorsport newspaper reporting from the perspectives of those creating articles (e.g. journalists), an aspect that previous feminist sports media scholarship has often overlooked (Schmidt, 2018). Feminist sports media scholarship analysis has tended to only address the representations of sportswomen from one perspective, that of the researcher, and are often critical of those producing newspaper articles. This current research has shown that what previous researchers have considered a deliberate act by the media to asymmetrically gender mark sportswomen (Fink, 2015; Bruce, 2016) is rather a product of somatization of the gender power relations in sports journalism that has been integrated into the journalist's habitus to embody the *doxa* of the field (sports journalism in this case) at an unconscious level (Brown, 2006). Moreover, the interviews provided further insights into the justifications for the focus on non-task related aspects in newspaper articles about women racing drivers. One such

justification was that the backgrounds of women racing drivers provided more interesting stories than those of their male peers due to their atypical journeys into motorsport, and also that women were more likely than men to talk about their backgrounds. Thus, this research has shown that complex practices are occurring which shape the representations of women racing drivers in the media. As a consequence of the interviews with journalists, I argue that although the outcomes of gendered discursive journalistic practices may marginalise or trivialise women racing drivers, it seems that its use is often operating below the conscious level or from a place of good, rather than ill, intent. The field would benefit from further research into the causes of this phenomenon, as it was beyond the scope of the current study.

It was also evident from the interviews with women racing drivers that the way their group is represented in the media did not always align with the way they wished to be represented. There was some frustration among the interviewees about the fact that their gender was often referenced and focused on in media interviews connected to the sport. Furthermore, women racing drivers did not identify with being called 'female racing drivers' as they explained that they were 'just' racing drivers. The consensus among the interviewed women racing drivers was that they were marginal in the sport and that this was also the case in media representations. The women racing drivers provided acceptance for the *othering* in the media, describing it as the status quo and suggested that it was a result of so few women in the sport, and it allowed for greater visibility of women racing drivers in and outside the sport. One interpretation of these findings could be that their justifications for this *othering* was a case of misrecognition and that the women drivers had internalised and embodied the symbolic violence enacted on them. Alternatively, these justifications could be interpreted as a pragmatic step in an intermediary process which would lead to an increase in the recognition of women racing drivers in the long-term.

Therefore, although at first sight the *othering* of women racing drivers by British newspapers can be interpreted as a case of them being negatively framed by the media, in fact the analysis for this thesis has shown that it is a more complex picture, as *othering* women racing drivers can be used to promote women in the sport as well as concurrently marginalising them.

### **8.2.2. (2) *Selling the story has allowed for more coverage of women racing drivers***

The second major finding of this research is that women racing drivers in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020 had often been represented as extraordinary and exceptional in a bid to 'sell the story', a point that only emerged from the interviews with journalists. There was a consensus amongst the journalists that there was a need to write articles with narratives (such as extraordinary and exceptional women) to 'sell the story' so that, the article could get through the editorial selection process and the article would engage readers. Moreover, the requirement to 'sell the story' was described by the interviewed journalists as a consequence of the limited number of women in the top echelons of the sport; they felt that this practice had resulted in greater, albeit still limited, coverage being given to women racing drivers in British newspapers.

There has been limited exploration in academic scholarship of the production process and related editorial decisions of articles about sportswomen. Most research has focused on analysing the product (e.g. discourse in newspaper articles). This blind spot has led to potentially incorrect assumptions about the intent of the media or journalists in previous analyses. The interviews with the journalists in this research revealed that the need for them to 'sell' the story to their editors resulted from the newspapers' commercial diktats. The commercial nature of newspapers has often been overlooked or brushed over in academic research, with the given reasoning for narratives often only considering patriarchal power, a point which this research has challenged.

Furthermore, this research has added to the hitherto limited understanding of the consequences of the dominance of F1 in British newspapers' motorsport coverage. The majority of the interviewees (both journalists and women racing drivers) regarded F1 as the most commercially driven and successful global racing series. As such, they felt this contributed to its domination of newspaper coverage, which in turn partly resulted in the limited coverage given to women. As there were no women racing drivers competing in F1 during the sample period, alternative forms of framing were required to fulfil the newspapers' commercial diktat if women racing drivers were to be reported on. The interviewed journalists explained that by framing

women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional, they could more easily sell stories about women racing drivers to their editors as newsworthy and thus fulfil the commercial diktat of the newspaper (an established part of the newspaper's doxa).

Additionally, this research reinforced the assertion that there were still underlying assumptions within newspaper sports editorial teams that readers were uninterested in women's sport (Laucella *et al.*, 2017). Thus, articles about women racing drivers needed to engage readers on another level. The journalists interviewed felt that this could be achieved through narratives of 'extraordinary and exceptional' women. In the same vein, the interviewed journalists indicated that the use of non-task related reporting of women racing drivers (such as their relationships and backgrounds) could also sell the story to readers. This research has added to the debate surrounding the use of non-task related and historical narratives in the reporting of sportswomen in newspapers. What this research has shown is that using these practices can simultaneously increase coverage and engage readers while at the same time reinforcing the patriarchal nature of a sport.

This research has shown that the writing and publishing process for articles about women racing drivers in British newspapers is complex and nuanced. Firstly, journalists need to be aware of women racing drivers in the sport which is more difficult as they often race in series outside of journalists' normal beat. Secondly, the choice to write an article on women racing drivers in the first place is dependent upon a journalist's habitus and values, which must include women in the sport, as they are often pitching the story rather than being told to write it. Therefore, if a journalist is uninterested in, or unaware of, women racing drivers they will, unsurprisingly, write fewer articles about the topic and thus fewer such articles will appear in the relevant newspaper(s). In addition, there ultimately needs to be an awareness of women racing drivers by the sports-desk or a desire for articles about sportswomen among the editorial team in order for articles to be published. What was clear from the interviewed journalists was they felt it was becoming easier to 'sell the story' of a woman racing driver due to a greater awareness of women in motorsport now than there was five years ago.

Finally, several implications of representing women racing drivers as exceptional and extraordinary women were raised by both groups of interviewees. The first was



that it made women racing drivers more visible, allowing for those outside of the sport to become aware of the possibility of participating in motorsport. There was also a belief among some of the interviewees that positioning women racing drivers as extraordinary and exceptional has allowed them to be presented as role models and that this could help shift the gender imbalance of the sport in the future. On the other hand, there were concerns that such representations of women racing drivers could lead to additional pressure and expectations on women already in the sport. Several interviewees cautioned that such narratives could further reduce women racing drivers to their gender in reporting. Finally, there were concerns that stories about women racing drivers could be exaggerated, which could distort the representations of them and create unrealistic expectations of current and future women in the sport. What is more, the disproportionate focus on 'average' women racing drivers in comparison to their male peers, just because they were women, was believed to create some friction and animosity between men and women racing drivers. Overall, in the interviews with women racing drivers there was tension between the negative implications associated with the 'extraordinary' and 'exceptional' narratives, and the belief that these narratives currently help increase the visibility of women in the sport by generating more interest and creating greater awareness in women racing drivers. This study has raised important questions about the nature of sports news article production and the implications of creating articles to fit within established parameters.

### **8.2.3. (3) *Changing times***

The third and final main finding of this research is that the media analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) identified emerging shifts in the coverage of women racing drivers. Evidence of these shifts could be seen in the increased levels of reporting and changes in the discursive journalistic practices and narratives within the articles, which were starting to become more aligned with those of their male peers. It is worth noting that although the research identified that the coverage of women racing drivers from 2018 onwards appeared to be significantly increasing, further research is needed to ascertain the extent of the trend due to the impact of Covid-19 on the data sample. However, even when racing was limited in 2020 due to the pandemic, articles about women racing drivers were still at levels higher than four earlier years in sample period (2010, 2011, 2014, 2017) when racing was

uninterrupted. Furthermore, the interviewees confirmed the presence of these shifts in their insights and experiences of the reporting on women racing drivers, with the majority describing what they perceived as the shifting attitudes of the press towards sportswomen.

One of the significant shifts this research has identified is in the performance reporting of women racing drivers: 43% of all the articles classified as 'performance' were published in the two-year period between 2019 and 2020. Moreover, since 2019 the reporting of women racing drivers' racing performance started to reflect what has traditionally been associated with men, whereby reporting focuses on sporting performance and athletic skill (Biscomb and Matheson, 2019). This was a stark shift from the way women racing drivers had previously been written about in British newspapers (Matthews and Pike, 2016). In articles, the women's racing performances were starting to be described in terms of being exciting, action-packed, and competitive. This finding provides further evidence of the shifting attitudes in the reporting of sportswomen in British newspapers with coverage becoming more equitable (such as Biscomb and Matheson, 2019; Petty and Pope, 2019; Leflay and Biscomb, 2021).

There was also evidence within the sample that several gendered discursive journalistic practices (gendered naming hierarchy, focus on femininity, and infantilisation) were waning and less prevalent across the whole sample period, which suggests that reporting is starting to become more aligned with that of male racing drivers where these practices rarely occur. Moreover, this research found that contrary to previous research, which has suggested that women in masculine sports tend to represent themselves in a more feminised manner to appear less masculine (Fink, Kane and LaVoi, 2014; Godoy-Pressland, 2016), women racing drivers described themselves as physically equal to men in the majority of articles examined. This challenges Pflugfelder's (2009) assertion that women racing drivers enhance their femininity to minimise the threat they pose and adds to Matthews and Pike's (2016) observation that this dynamic is no longer common in motorsport. Furthermore, this research identified that there has been a shift in representations of women racing drivers with them now being represented as role models, a phenomenon that previous research identified as lacking in motorsport coverage (Matthews and Pike, 2016).

This study also found that the way discursive journalistic practices are used in reporting women in mixed-gendered sports appears to differ from those seen in sex-segregated sports. There is a risk that as women racing drivers compete directly against men, reporting on women racing drivers using gendered discursive journalistic practices to undermine them could inadvertently undermine the men in the sport at the same time. Future investigation across more sex-integrated sports is required to further understand this phenomenon and ascertain if it is unique to motorsport.

In addition to the evidence of changing attitudes towards women racing drivers found in the articles analysed, the interviewees also identified that there were changes. Participants felt that since 2017 there has been an increasing interest in women racing drivers from the media. Moreover, the interviewed journalists and women racing drivers identified several different factors which they believed had created the changes in the way women racing drivers were reported on, as identified above. Overwhelmingly, changes in attitudes towards women's sport, sportswomen and women in wider society were seen to be the primary catalysts for the changes in the coverage of women racing drivers and changes within motorsport more generally. Moreover, the launch of the WSeries—a women-only series—was seen by most participants as a significant game changer by both increasing the visibility of women in the sport and enabling journalists to write more performance-based articles.

Among the participants there was a shared belief that for significant change to occur in the coverage of women racing drivers –that is, for coverage to become fully aligned with that of male racing drivers– a woman needs to race full-time in F1. Moreover, it was acknowledged by the interviewed journalists that any woman who achieved this would likely have to endure heightened scrutiny and pressure because of the resulting media attention. They felt that, depending on how the media chose to represent her and the support provided to her by the racing authorities and her team, this could be overwhelming. However, overall, the participants were optimistic about the future of women racing drivers, believing that the representations of them in British newspapers would become more normalised and that ultimately, they would be seen as just racing drivers without gender being an issue.

In sum, this research has shown that the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020 does still reinforce the idea that motorsport is something of a boys' club. However, this study has also shown that there have been positive developments in the representations of women racing drivers in British newspapers thus both challenging and adding to the conclusions of previous research. Moreover, this research has identified and explored the complexities in the coverage and narratives of women racing drivers that concurrently marginalise and celebrate them. The implications, both positive and negative, resulting from representations of women racing drivers as outside of the boys' club have also been discussed.

### **8.3. Contribution to the field**

Several significant contributions are made by this research to the academic fields of sport and media studies, specifically the fields of sports sociology, sport communication, sports media, sports journalism, feminist sport studies and motorsport studies. Firstly, this thesis contributes to the limited body of existent literature exploring motorsport and extends the knowledge about the dynamics of gender in newspaper's sports reporting. The thesis' most important contribution is the analysis of how newspaper articles represent women racing drivers between 2010 and 2020 and the experiences and insights from women racing drivers and journalists. As previously noted, research investigating women racing drivers to date has tended to use multi-method approaches combining qualitative media analysis with interviews (see Matthews and Pike, 2016; Tolvhed, 2017), but has largely been devoid of quantitative data. Thus, this thesis has made a unique contribution to understanding the representation of women racing drivers over the past decade (2010 to 2020) as it is the first research to provide in-depth quantitative analysis examining how women racing drivers have been represented in British newspapers. Moreover, this is the first research to examine the differences between the different types of British newspapers' representations of women racing drivers. This research has also increased our understandings of the contemporary themes and discursive journalistic practises prevalent in the representations of women racing drivers, providing clear evidence that women racing drivers are still seen as *others* and outsiders in the sport. Importantly, this research has shown that whilst this can be

negative and can marginalise women racing drivers, representing them as *others* can also be beneficial. Furthermore, this research has shown how representations of women racing drivers in the media are shaped by various intersections of field, habitus, and capital.

Secondly, this research contributes to feminist sports media studies in several ways. The first is through the interviews with motorsport journalists as this research has added to understandings of how journalism practices impact on the coverage of women racing drivers. The study has highlighted the challenges of the intersection of a journalist's agency and the sometimes-limiting structure of the media field and the impact this has on the coverage of women racing drivers. The second way this thesis adds to the feminist sports media field is that it contributes new understandings of how newspapers treat women in mixed-gender sports. As previously discussed, very few sports, facilitate an opportunity for men and women to compete directly against each other (Channon *et al.*, 2016). Motorsport is one, due to the race car removing physical differences between the sexes (Pflugfelder, 2009). This research has indicated potential differences in how newspapers represent women in mixed-gender sports, suggesting that some gendered discursive journalistic practices may be avoided in the reporting of women racing drivers, as there is a risk of such practices indirectly undermining the position of men in the sport. This research has not only contributed to the understanding of how women are represented in the reporting of such sports, but it has also explored both how women racing drivers experience the reporting and their views on the representations of women racing drivers, thereby making a unique contribution to this under-researched area.

Finally, this research adds to the growing body of research of Bourdieu's (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) work in feminist thinking and sports media analysis. In particular, this research has reflected Bourdieu's ideas on the operations of sport in his chapter titled 'How can one be a sportsman?' (1993). This can be seen in how transformations in fields and consumption demands influence how representations of women racing drivers are made and interpreted. Moreover, Bourdieu reminds us that success in the field is determined by the capital and the habitus of the individual aligning to the field's doxa and the subsequent monopolistic power relations that occur, which shape and influence the outcomes (Bourdieu, 1993). These are further

moulded by interactions of gender (Bourdieu, 2001). Throughout the thesis, it was evident that Bourdieu's (1977; 1984; 1990; 2001) theoretical concepts can help explain not only how women racing drivers are represented in the media but also the complex ways in which gender relations operate within journalistic production, personal interpretation and within different fields (motorsport and newspapers in the case of this research). Moreover, we are reminded by Bourdieu (1993; 2005) that despite the current beliefs held by fields and individuals there is scope for change, of which this study has found some evidence.

#### **8.4. *Limitations***

Although this research has sought to address some of the limitations identified in previous research within the fields of gender, media, and motorsport studies, and that actions were taken within the present study to minimise issues of credibility, rigor, trustworthiness, and validity (discussed in Chapter 3), there are several limitations that need to be noted. These will now be discussed, encompassing some of the points highlighted earlier in the thesis (see Chapter 3).

Firstly, how the data was collected through LexisNexis Academic meant that the articles could not be viewed as they would have been presented in the print newspapers. As such accompanying images, font size and choice, layout and positioning of articles were unknown. Future research could examine the positioning of articles about women racing drivers and how women racing drivers are represented in images in newspapers.

Secondly, although this current study has been written within a feminist standpoint framework, which challenges the legitimacy of androcentric terms such as subjectivity and objectivity, my position as sole researcher (and motorsport enthusiast) can be viewed as a limitation to the objectivity of the study. However, my personal involvement in and experiences with motorsport have provided me with important insights into the issues and challenges that can exist within the sport which have informed the choice of methodology and design of this research. Equally, my inherent enthusiasm (which is not often encouraged in positivist research) has brought a richness, depth of understanding, and appreciation for the topic (see Chapter 3 where my positionality is discussed). Furthermore, the

connections and knowledge that I have developed over the past 10 years were an asset to the research, enabling me to draw upon my habitus and social, and sporting capital when engaging with (potential) participants and gatekeepers to build rapport and trust with them. As such, my position in the research, in some respects, has allowed me to obtain the desired stronger objectivity as defined by leading feminist standpoint epistemologist Sandra Harding (Harding, 2007). Moreover, as advocated by Bourdieu (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and feminists (see Cooky, 2017), reflexivity and awareness of my positionality have been integral to the research process.

Finally, caution is needed with regards to the generalisability of the findings of this research. The interviewees predominantly identified as white. This lack of diversity in the sample reflects the acknowledged lack of diversity in motorsport (FIA, 2020c) and the British media (Tobitt, 2021). However, as previously discussed proportionally this sample had greater representation of BAME than in motorsport in general. It is important to note, that the recruitment of participants using the snowballing sampling method may have limited the diversity of the sample. Further research is needed across sports media scholarship to understand the intersections of race, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, and other areas of potential social inequality in media production, representations, and reception, as well as in the experiences of journalists and sportswomen, especially in motorsport. Despite the lack of diversity in the sample, this research does provide invaluable and unique insights into the experiences of women racing drivers and those involved in the production of motorsport media.

Another possible issue of generalisability relates to the relatively small sample size of interviewees used. Although this limits the discussion, the primary purpose of this research was to conduct a media analysis to explore how women racing drivers were represented in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020, and the inclusion of interviews was to provide insights into relatively unknown areas of academic investigation, i.e. journalists' motivations for writing articles, how women racing drivers felt about media representations, and their experiences with journalists. This aspect of the research aimed to provide a starting point for future, deeper investigation into the experiences of motorsport journalists and women racing drivers in relation to media representations.

## **8.5. Recommendations**

There are several recommendations that can be made from the research findings, analysis, and conclusions. These are aimed at: (1) journalism practitioners, (2) motorsport administrators, and (3) future researchers.

### **8.5.1. Recommendations for journalism practitioners**

- a. Review what training exists for new and current journalists regarding the use of gendered discursive journalistic practices and ensure that training raises the awareness of the implications of their use within reporting.
- b. Adopt a consistent and inclusive approach to reporting racing drivers and racing series in relation to gender-marking. All racing drivers should be gender-marked (men and women) on the first instance they are mentioned in an article, with any subsequent mentions just using their surname alongside correct pronouns. This will allow for the visibility of women in the sport but place them on an equal footing with their male peers, thus restricting the assumption that racing drivers are men. With regards to the racing series, I caution against gender-marking of sex segregated series (i.e. women-only). While I recognise it is important to highlight that these are women-only spaces and the reasons as to why this is the case, gender-marking the series is not the way to achieve this. These directives should be adopted by the Associated Press's 'Stylebook', (the industry's gold standard), and also be added to individual media companies' own style guides. All updates to style guides should be delivered through a system such as MetaEngage<sup>42</sup> which requires acknowledgement of the changes by all individuals within that organisation.
- c. Review the existing communication channels between journalists and racing drivers to create a best practice to ensure clarity for both sides. The best practice needs to be clearly articulated and communicated to all levels of motorsport.

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<sup>42</sup> MetaEngage is a cloud-based staff engagement tool by MetaCompliance. The software enables companies to effectively communicate, educate and engage employees with new policies, compliance training etc. The way the software operates guarantees participation (MetaCompliance, 2018).



- d. Devote more space to lower-level and domestic racing series in newspapers and broaden the racing disciplines reported on. This would provide more opportunities for direct comparisons between male and female racing drivers and could potentially increase the readership.

### **8.5.2. Recommendations for motorsport administrators**

- a. Following the introduction of the FIA's first Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Advisor in June 2022, the FIA should conduct an extensive review to ascertain the issues and barriers preventing women's involvement in the sport at all levels and consider the media within this analysis. Outcomes of this need to be adopted across all National Automobile Clubs or Associations (ACNs).
- b. Review the support and training that is provided to racing drivers at all levels of the sport in relation to dealing with the media.
- c. Remove women's championship titles for top placing women within all sex-integrated competitions.

### **8.5.3. Recommendations for future researchers**

Throughout this thesis I have highlighted areas for future research which were beyond the scope of the current study. In addition to this, I have detailed areas for future research considering the limitations of this research. In addition to these recommendations the following suggestions can also be made for future research:

- a. Based on the interviews with women racing drivers the prominence of social media for news gathering provides a line for future enquiry. Therefore, future research should examine the representations of women racing drivers in social media and examine the ways in which sports news is consumed and produced within social media.
- b. Future research should also interrogate representations of women racing drivers within an international scope. This would be a worthwhile endeavour considering previous research has identified differences in coverage of motorsport series in different countries (see Robeers, 2019c). This is especially relevant in the case of women racing drivers as several non-British women have had success in international competitions (see Chapter 4), and

therefore it would be useful to understand how they are represented in their native countries and how British women racing drivers are represented in non-UK media reports.

- c. A third avenue for future research would be to examine the representations of women racing drivers in motorsport-specific media, such as motorsport magazines, motorsport newspapers, motorsport websites, and motorsport blogs and podcasts.
- d. Future research is needed to explore and understand the readers of British newspapers' perspectives on the coverage of women racing drivers, and how their interpretations compared to those found in this current research.

## **8.6. Concluding thoughts**

While conducting and writing up the research, the involvement of women in motorsport has continued to grow. At the beginning of the process in 2019 I struggled to find racing series with women racing drivers on TV, whereas in 2023 as I write up this thesis, I have been able to watch more women racing, in more racing series, than when I started my research. The recent success of women racing drivers achieving podium finishes in international motor racing has also been notable. For example in 2022 Dorine Pin was the Ferrari Challenge European Trofeo Pirelli Champion (Ferrari N.V., 2023b); in 2023 at the WEC round at Spa-Francorchamps, Lilou Wadoux became the first woman to win a WEC race in the LMGTE-Am class (Ferrari N.V., 2023a); Cristina Gutiérrez has had success at the Dakar Rally- in 2021 she won a rally stage, in 2022 she finished third in her class (the same year she won the Extreme E Championship with Sébastien Loeb) and in 2023 she won the prologue and last stage of the rally (Red Bull, 2023). Additionally, Extreme E launched in 2021 with its 50:50 racing driver line-ups which has guaranteed visibility of women racing drivers on the podium in every round. Furthermore, new racing series involving women racing drivers and new pathways to talent spot and support women and girls have been launched (F1 Academy, 2023; More Than Equal, 2023). However, despite the apparent progression of women in the sport, the challenges for women racing drivers are ever present, highlighted by the cancelling of the final three races of the third WSeries Championship in 2022 due to funding issues, despite it being a supporting series to F1 (WSeries, 2022).

On a personal note, embarking on the journey to complete this research has been extremely rewarding. The research allowed me to explore an area that greatly interests me whilst being able to make meaningful contributions to motorsport and the understanding of women in sport. Moreover, the process of writing this thesis has not only allowed me to develop my research and writing skills but also provided me with an opportunity to explore my experiences as a woman and embrace being a feminist—a point that at the start of the research I would have shied away from making. I hope that this thesis will encourage more research into women in motorsport and that more experiences can be shared. This research would not have been possible without the participants, who were all so passionate about women in sport and so willing to share their experiences and views, I hope that this has been conveyed for all to see.

Finally, to conclude this thesis, I want to stress that the gender inequality that I have discussed is only one of many inequalities (including, for example, LGBTQ+, class, disability, and race) that motorsport, sport, and society need to address. This was highlighted by a comment from one of the interviewees, who said: “I’m terrified to talk about the fact that I am a person of colour in motorsport as I don’t need the backlash that comes with it.”. No one should be “terrified” to express their opinion on a matter of such importance.

## Appendix

### ***Reference list of articles about women racing drivers***

Below is a reference list of all the newspaper articles that formed the dataset about women racing drivers. It is organised by newspaper, chronologically and then within in each year alphabetically. Please note that the titles of the articles are as downloaded on LexisNexis Academic in 2020/2021.

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- AM Series, Blancpain Sprint Series & Others), Touring Car Racing (World Touring Car Championship, BTCC, DTM, Others), Sprint Car Racing (Lucas Oil ASCS Sprint Car Series, World of Outlaws & Others), Hill Climb Racing (FIA European Hill Climb Championship, FIA International Hill Climb Cup, British Hill Climb Championship, Championnat de France de la Montagne & Others), Off Road Racing (Lucas Oil Off Road Racing Series, TORC - Forecast(2022 - 2027): Report Code: ATR 0005. Available at: <https://www.industryarc.com/Report/17/global-motorsporting-motorsports-market.html> (Accessed: 06/12/ 2022).*
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