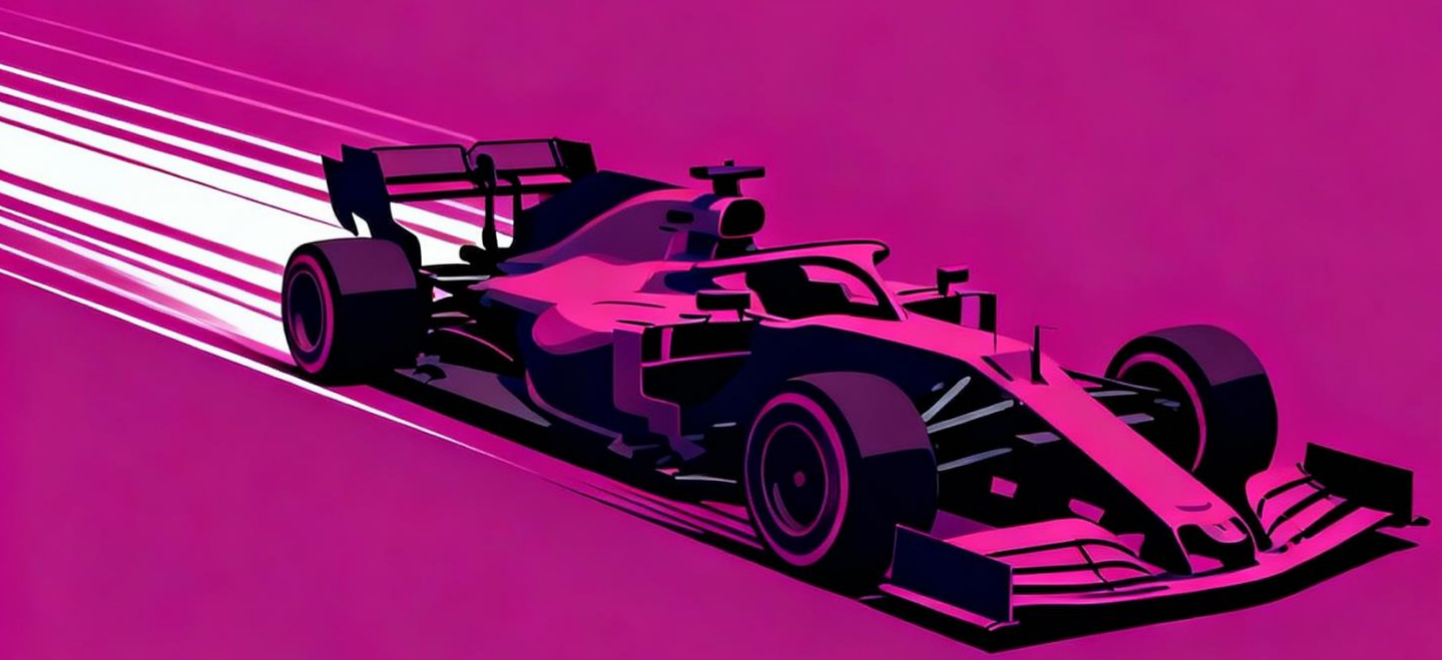




Beyond the Fast Lane: How F1 Academy Reframes Competition and Gender in Modern Media

Karina Gundersborg Skov
Master's Thesis – Aalborg University
02/10/2025

Abstract

The thesis argues that legitimacy, representation, and authority for women athletes in elite motorsport are actively constructed and resisted, particularly within the male-dominated context. Using the F1 Academy, established in 2023 by Formula 1 and the FIA, as a case study, it examines the mechanisms driving such developments. The F1 Academy aims to promote gender equity by providing a series dedicated to women in reworked Formula cars and amplifying their experiences through digital storytelling. However, despite these initiatives, recent data show that women represent only 10% of motorsport roles globally, and this percentage has remained unchanged, revealing a persistent and urgent barrier to progress.

This raises the question of whether current motorsport initiatives can bring sustained change and create lasting opportunities for female drivers. Additionally, the study investigates how these efforts shape societal perceptions of women in motorsport. Employing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the paper argues how media discourse maintains or disrupts power relations and ideologies around women in sport. The dataset comprises F1 Academy-affiliated Instagram posts, fan comments, episodes from Netflix shows such as *F1: The Academy* and *Drive to Survive*, major news articles from Motorsport and BBC, and academic commentary on gender and sport. The analysis reveals that while F1 Academy enhances women's visibility and narrative control, the media often frames female drivers as exceptions, prioritising gender over performance. Male drivers remain the benchmark, while coverage of female athletes centres on role-model status or novelty rather than skill, though some outlets have begun shifting toward more equitable reporting.

This research concludes that debates over fairness, legitimacy, and authority for women in motorsport are ongoing and central to the field's evolution. Both official and fan narratives question the sub-series' effectiveness and risk of tokenism, while women strive to establish parity as athletes versus symbols. The thesis argues that, while language and

perceptions are evolving, full equality, as measured by trust, leadership, and presence, remains an incomplete goal. Sustained collaboration among all stakeholders is imperative for continued progress, as gender continues to shape media coverage and power structures in motorsport.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	1
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: MEDIA FRAMING AND GENDER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MOTORSPORT	8
2.1 HISTORIC FRAMING AND GENDERED LANGUAGE IN MOTORSPORT MEDIA	8
2.2 UNDER-REPRESENTATION AND EDITORIAL BIAS	9
2.3 STEREOTYPES, OBJECTIFICATION, AND DOUBLE BINDS	9
2.4 MEDIA NARRATIVES AROUND THE F1 ACADEMY	10
2.5 THE ROLE OF DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA	10
2.6 COMPARATIVE FRAMING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GENDER EQUITY	11
2.7 GAPS IN CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP AND FUTURE RESEARCH	11
2.8 SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	12
3 THEORY	13
3.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)	14
3.1.2 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model	15
3.2 KEY ANALYTICAL TERMS IN THIS THESIS	17
3.2.1 Discursive construction	17
3.2.2 Representation	17
3.2.3 Agency	18
3.2.4 Ideology	18
3.2.5 Normalisation	18
3.2.6 Intertextuality	18
3.2.7 Assumption and presupposition	19
3.2.8 Order of discourse	19
3.2.9 Semiotic grammar	19
3.2.10 Modality	19
3.3 RATIONALE FOR EXCLUSIVE USE OF CDA	20

4	METHODOLOGY	20
4.1	DATA COLLECTION	21
4.2	SAMPLING STRATEGY.....	21
4.3	ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE	22
4.4	CONSIDERATIONS	22
5	ANALYSIS: MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE F1 ACADEMY VERSUS MALE- DOMINATED SERIES	23
5.1	INSTAGRAM POSTS ANALYSIS.....	24
5.1.0	<i>F1 Academy's Instagram Narrative versus Motorsport.com's Audience Discourse</i>	<i>74</i>
5.2	<i>F1: THE ACADEMY, NETFLIX SERIES</i>	<i>76</i>
5.2.1	<i>No Friends on Track, F1: The Academy, Episode 1</i>	<i>77</i>
5.2.2	<i>The One to Beat, F1: The Academy, Episode 2</i>	<i>80</i>
5.2.3	<i>Target On My Back from F1: The Academy</i>	<i>87</i>
5.2.4	<i>F1: Drive to survive versus F1 academy: the series</i>	<i>90</i>
5.3	MEDIA COVERAGE OF F1 ACADEMY	92
5.3.1	<i>Motorsport review</i>	<i>92</i>
5.3.2	<i>Discussion under F1 academy post.....</i>	<i>96</i>
5.3.3	<i>BBC article</i>	<i>98</i>
5.3.4	<i>Skysports' article</i>	<i>100</i>
6	PERSPECTIVE: PLACING THE THESIS IN BROADER CONTEXTS	101
7	CONCLUSION	104
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
	APPENDIX	110
	APPENDIX 1 (F1ACADEMY, JULY 23RD, 2025).....	110
	APPENDIX 2 (F1ACADEMY, JULY 14, 2025).....	111
	APPENDIX 3 (JOANNECICONTE, F1ACADEMY, JULY 24, 2025)	112
	APPENDIX 4 (F1ACADEMY, JULY 24, 2025).....	113
	APPENDIX 5 (F1, JULY 24, 2025).....	114

APPENDIX 6 (F1, JULY 16, 2025).....	115
APPENDIX 7 (PUMASPORT, F1, JULY 29, 2025).....	116
APPENDIX 8 (F1, JULY 29, 2025).....	117
APPENDIX 9 (NETFLIXUK, F1ACADEMY, APRIL 23RD, 2025).....	118
<i>Appendix 9a</i>	118
<i>Appendix 9b</i>	119
<i>Appendix 9c</i>	119
APPENDIX 10 (F1ACADEMY, JULY 7TH, 2025).....	120
<i>Appendix 10a</i>	121
<i>Appendix 10b</i>	122
<i>Appendix 10c</i>	123
APPENDIX 11 (MOTOSPORTCOM, MAY 1ST, 2025).....	124
<i>Appendix 11a</i>	125
<i>Appendix 11b</i>	126
<i>Appendix 11c</i>	127
<i>Appendix 11d</i>	128
<i>Appendix 11e</i>	129
<i>Appendix 11f</i>	130
<i>Appendix 11g</i>	131
APPENDIX 12A.....	132
<i>Appendix 12b</i>	133
<i>Appendix 12c</i>	134
<i>Appendix 12d</i>	135
<i>Appendix 12e</i>	136
<i>Appendix 12f</i>	137

1. Introduction

Motorsport occupies a unique place in global sport, blending technical innovation, commercial spectacle, and cultural mythology. At its core, Formula 1 is the pinnacle: it attracts millions of fans, vast sponsorship, and top engineering minds. Supporting this are feeder series, including Formula 2, Formula 3, national F4 championships, and grassroots karting, all designed to discover, nurture, and elevate the next generation of talent. Despite promoting meritocracy, motorsport's hierarchy excludes women, with F1 having seen only five female drivers in its 75-year history. These figures are not due to differences in ability, but rather reflect enduring systemic barriers (Francis). This thesis examines how legitimacy and opportunities for women are constructed and challenged within this broader context.

In recent years, initiatives like the FIA-led Girls on Track, More Than Equal (Inside track), and the W Series have set key precedents for closing the gender gap. Since launching in 2023, F1 Academy has further shaped the conversation and support for female drivers. As an all-female, Formula 1-backed series, it raises the profile and develops the skills of young women, serving as a stepping stone to higher categories, collaborating with leading teams, and featuring drivers at top Formula 1 events. As explained by founder Susie Wolff and FIA leadership, F1 Academy's mission is not only to create opportunities but to shift motorsport's culture by challenging exclusion and normalising women in high-performance roles.

Sponsorships, documentaries, celebrity involvement, and social media have established F1 Academy as more than a racing series; it is a visible platform for cultural change and debate.

Despite expanded visibility, critical questions remain. Does creating women-only categories, such as the F1 Academy, advance gender equity or reinforce barriers through segregation? What is the motivational, structural, and symbolic impact of increased representation in imagery and storytelling? Do these initiatives challenge stereotypes or

merely reframe them, even when presented as an empowerment tool? Crucially, how are these efforts received, contested, or renegotiated in online forums and comment threads, where legitimacy, belonging, and authority are always up for debate?

This thesis uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how legitimacy, representation, and authority for women in elite motorsport are constructed, contested, and negotiated. The focus is on F1 Academy. The study systematically compares the Academy's self-presentation across Instagram, promotional campaigns, and official communications. It contrasts these with discourses from audience commentary and media, including Netflix series. The goal is to show how meaning is co-produced in digital spaces. Here, gender, success, and inclusion are continually debated.

Research Question:

1. How is F1 Academy represented in media versus male-dominated categories such as Formula 1 and Formula 3?

Sub-questions:

1. What linguistic patterns and themes are evident in media coverage of the F1 Academy?
2. Do media narratives challenge or reinforce stereotypes about women in motorsport?
3. What do these narratives mean for gender equity in motorsport?

This thesis examines how top-down and bottom-up dynamics shape the gender discourse in motorsport. It analyses the opportunities and challenges for lasting legitimacy and equity for women at the world's leading racing stage. It shows that representation and authority are socially contingent, produced and resisted through dialogue in official and public spheres.

2. Literature Review: Media Framing and Gender

Representation of Women in Motorsport

Media coverage is a primary force in shaping the public's understanding of gender within sports, and is especially consequential in male-dominated arenas, such as motorsport. While institutional changes, such as the creation of the F1 Academy, aim to disrupt entrenched gender norms, research demonstrates that the media constructs and perpetuates expectations about who belongs in racing and how their stories are told (McCarthy et al. 2022). This review directly addresses the primary research question: How is the F1 Academy represented in media compared to male-dominated categories such as Formula 1 and Formula 3? Sub-questions focus on linguistic patterns, the reinforcement or challenge of stereotypes, and the consequences for gender equity in motorsport.

2.1 Historic Framing and Gendered Language in Motorsport Media

Academic investigations consistently find that media and institutions position female drivers as exceptions rather than equals. Matthews and Pike's work, *What on Earth Are They Doing in a Racing Car?* reveals how even seemingly positive media attention perpetuates exceptionalism by labelling women as "firsts" or "trailblazers" rather than recording their skill in the same terms used for men (Matthews and Pike 2016). Such linguistic patterns hierarchise gender, making male participation the default and female participation the deviation. Furthermore, Kian et al. demonstrate that women's sporting achievements are often overshadowed by human-interest stories, which draw attention to emotions, family, or personal obstacles (Kian et al. 2007). This focus reinforces long-standing gender scripts because media and commentators align women with affect and men with competition. These actors trivialise women's visibility in sport, and as McCarthy et al. explain, this process

produces the 'symbolic annihilation' of women, undercutting their visibility by making it appear insignificant (McCarthy et al. 2022).

2.2 Under-Representation and Editorial Bias

Researchers highlight specific structural factors that underpin underrepresentation.

Campbell's doctoral work examines how British newspaper coverage from 2010 to 2020 perpetuated a boys' club paradigm, allocating less space and less analytical rigor to stories about female drivers, and framing their success not as athletic but as a social achievement (Campbell 2023). It aligns with findings by Howe et al., who document persistent institutional gatekeeping: sponsorships and opportunities are closely tied to an athlete's media visibility, which in turn is shaped by editorial preferences and ingrained cultural biases (Howe et al. 2022). Advertisers often portray women in promotional content as passive or audience-facing, and they rarely depict women in action-oriented or competitive imagery (Cuneen, Ridinger, and Ross 2009).

2.3 Stereotypes, Objectification, and Double Binds

Media in both editorial and advertising contexts oscillates between hyperfeminisation, casting women as "divas" or "eye candy" and desexualisation, branding leading female drivers "one of the boys" (Cuneen, Ridinger, and Ross 2009). These frameworks create a double bind, where legitimacy and femininity are constructed as mutually exclusive, and true inclusion as athletes remains out of reach. Narratives centred on overcoming adversity reinforce the notion that women's success is exceptional, not expected (Campbell 2023, Howe et al. 2022). Covering personal struggle, rather than sporting results, highlights difference instead of competition.

2.4 Media Narratives Around the F1 Academy

The F1 Academy, as an all-female junior series, represents a recent institutional initiative aimed at addressing gender inequity in motorsport. Early media analysis underscores that coverage may be more frequent but not always more equitable or performance-focused. Studies and media audits reveal that stories about the F1 Academy often emphasise the novelty of the league, participants' emotional journeys, and their roles as role models more frequently than tactical performance or sporting prowess (Mitchel 2024, Howe et al. 2022)

Comparatively, media stories about Formula 1 and Formula 3 continue to focus on competitive drama, technical mastery, and trajectories toward championship titles, especially for male racers (Matthews and Pike 2016, Campbell 2023). This coverage reinforces the impression that women's racing remains 'other,' and journalists portray it as a divergence from the norm rather than as a parallel field of accomplishment.

2.5 The Role of Digital and Social Media

While social and digital channels offer new pathways for self-representation, research is cautious in declaring them free of gender bias. As "Inside Track: Exploring the Gender Gap in Motorsport" details, social media allows female racers to present more nuanced stories and bypass some traditional editorial filters (Inside Track). However, these spaces also open new forms of gendered scrutiny, demand heightened self-branding, and expose athletes to increased levels of harassment and critique (Howe et al. 2022, Inside Track). Positive outcomes can be observed, such as increased sponsor engagement through well-managed digital campaigns, however, the same binaries and stereotypes are often reproduced, albeit in a democratically distributed environment.

2.6 Comparative Framing and Implications for Gender Equity

Direct comparisons between F1 Academy coverage and that of traditional, male-dominated series reveal enduring gaps. Mainstream media in established series prioritise technical analysis, overt competitive rhetoric, and a presumption of audience familiarity with athletes' capabilities, attributes that are less frequently granted in coverage of women's motorsport, where novelty and social narrative remain foregrounded (Campbell 2023, Matthews and Pike 2016). These narrative disparities have practical implications: lacking the benefits of performance-based reporting and technical breakdown, female drivers may struggle to gain recognition as competitors, face difficulty attracting sponsors, and have limited influence on aspiring athletes who seek skill-based role models.

2.7 Gaps in Current Scholarship and Future Research

Despite growing scholarly attention to gender representation in motorsport, critical gaps remain. The advancement of initiatives such as the F1 Academy and the increased use of digital platforms have not yet been matched by a fully comprehensive research agenda. The literature identifies several unresolved issues such as

- 1) **lack of International and Multi-Platform Comparison:** Most existing studies examine gender representation within a single national context or a specific media type. Systematic, comparative research that maps how women in motorsport are covered across different countries, languages, and both print and digital media remains rare. This limits the identification of global patterns or unique cultural approaches to gendered narratives in sports.
- 2) **Underexplored Intersectionality:** Accounts of gender in motorsport too often treat women as a monolithic group. There is limited analysis of how intersecting identities, such as race, sexuality, or class, influence media representation and access within the sport. Available research suggests these factors may create compounded challenges, but comprehensive intersectional analysis is lacking (Campbell

2023, Howe et al. 2022). 3) Limited Longitudinal Analysis: Long-term studies evaluating the impact of significant institutional changes, like the launch of the F1 Academy or the adoption of digital engagement strategies, are still emerging. Few works track developments over time or compare media coverage before and after such initiatives to determine whether substantial progress is being made.

2.8 Synthesis and Recommendations

Drawing on the available research, several key themes and recommendations emerge: 1)

Persistent Gendered Framing: Despite increased attention and visibility, media representations of women in motorsport remain strongly influenced by gendered frames.

Narratives across both legacy and digital outlets tend to foreground novelty and adversity, rather than competitive achievement and skill (Matthews and Pike 2016, Cuneen et al. 2009, McCarthy et al. 2022).

2) **Prioritise Performance-Based Storytelling:** To promote genuine equity, scholars advocate for a shift in coverage that focuses on competition, results, and technical expertise, rather than personal struggles or superficial appearance. Elevating the merit of sports regardless of gender would help normalise female participation and challenge entrenched biases. 3) **Inclusive Commentary and Institutional Support:** Broader inclusion of women as journalists, commentators, and decision-makers in the motorsport industry is essential. Expanding the diversity of voices in media and within organisations responsible for sponsorship and coverage can reframe public discourse and reduce the persistence of stereotypes (Cuneen, Ridinger, and Ross 2009, Campbell 2023, Howe et al. 2022).

4) **Intentional Use of Digital Platforms:** While digital and social media offer opportunities for self-advocacy and broader exposure, deliberate strategies are needed. Education in best practices and active support for female athletes can help them maximise positive engagement and mitigate risks such as online harassment or the reproduction of gendered tropes.

By addressing these research gaps and embracing these recommendations, scholars, journalists, and industry leaders can work together to advance both empirical understanding and equitable representation of women in motorsport.

Motorsport media remains at a crossroads: structural efforts, such as the F1 Academy, and the rise of digital storytelling platforms present opportunities for unprecedented visibility and change. However, until the narratives and linguistic strategies surrounding women in racing truly shift towards parity, emphasising achievement, competition, and skill equity in perception and opportunity will remain an unfinished project. Institutions, media scholars, and advocates for diverse representation must work actively in all arenas to reshape not just who races, but also how those races are told.

3 Theory

This project examines how the F1 Academy, a women-only racing series, is portrayed in the media in comparison to male-dominated categories, such as Formula 1 and Formula 3. The main argument is that media narratives use language and ideology to differentiate the representation of women in motorsport. Central to the analysis is the examination of language, narrative structure, and ideology within media discourse, grounded exclusively in Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA serves as both a theoretical and methodological lens to interrogate how language functions as a form of social practice. It analyses discourse as not only reflecting reality but as actively shaping and contesting social relations and ideologies (Fairclough 2003). CDA is centrally focused on how discourse produces, reproduces, or challenges power, asking which voices are amplified or silenced, how identities are constructed, and how legitimacy is conferred through language.

The media portrayal of the F1 Academy is examined through Fairclough's three dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Textual analysis explores vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric to reveal how terms like "rookie," "trailblazer," or "Academy-backed" shape perceptions of female drivers. Discursive practice examines how texts are produced and consumed, with media routines shaping the prioritised perspectives. Social practice situates these discourses within motorsport's male-dominated history, analysing whether they challenge or reinforce gender power structures.

By applying CDA, this study transitions from detailed linguistic analysis to a broad interpretation of sports media discourse. This approach ensures a coherent critical methodology that not only assesses F1 Academy's representation but also interrogates how such representations shape women's legitimacy, visibility, and authority in motorsport.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) underpins the project as its theoretical framework and methodological approach, examining the interplay between language, power, and ideology. CDA especially benefits research into media discourse and its impact on social perception by revealing not just what is communicated, but also how and why it constructs or challenges existing power structures. In this study, CDA is applied to analyses of F1 Academy media representation, compared to male-dominated motorsport categories, providing tools to identify linguistic and thematic patterns that uphold or resist gendered ideologies.

CDA maintains that language is an active force shaping social realities. As Fairclough states, "Discourse is not just a reflection of the world; it is a way of representing it from a particular perspective" (Fairclough 2006, 39). Media coverage therefore frames sports events within ideologically charged narratives that may reinforce or contest gender hierarchies. CDA aims to expose ideologies in discourse. Van Dijk stresses the focus on power: "CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted,

legitimised, and so on, by language use” (van Dijk 1993, 249). This makes CDA suitable for examining how F1 Academy athletes are linguistically positioned in comparison to male drivers. Analysing lexical choices and narrative framing reveals whether the media reinforces stereotypes or supports equitable representation.

CDA's focus on power connects to critical theory and theorists like Foucault, who viewed discourse as central to power and knowledge. Fairclough's three-dimensional model examines (1) text, (2) discursive practice, and (3) social practice (Fairclough 2006). In sports media, this involves analysing language in articles about F1 Academy drivers, journalistic norms, and societal perceptions of gender in motorsport.

CDA is valuable for showing how media discourse naturalises unequal power. Ruth Wodak says discourses “construct, stabilise and legitimise knowledge and social relations, including the status quo” (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 10). Emphasising women drivers' appearance or novelty can subtly reinforce their outsider status. Such choices, even if subtle, contribute to the broader marginalisation of women in motorsport by positioning them as secondary. CDA rejects objectivity, acknowledging its political stance. CDA researchers oppose inequality, seeking to expose how discourse fosters oppression, aligning with feminist research goals. In analysing F1 Academy media, CDA enables feminist critique of language around gender and sport. CDA's adaptability across media formats suits the digital age. Analysis applies to news, social media, interviews, or press releases, capturing how different platforms build narratives. This is useful for comparing independent media and official motorsport organisations.

3.1.2 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

This thesis applies Fairclough's tripartite framework, which provides distinct but interconnected analytical dimensions. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical

discourse analysis provides a comprehensive framework for interrogating not just the language used in media texts, but also the broader relationships between discourse, power, and society. The first dimension, textual analysis (Description), compels the analyst to pay close attention to vocabulary choice, grammar, rhetorical figures, and the use of evaluative adjectives, as well as the overall narrative structure present within the text. For example, within the domain of motorsport media, specific terms such as “rookie,” “trailblazer,” or “Academy-backed” do not merely describe but function as linguistic markers of difference, institutional affiliation, or perceived historical significance. These word choices shape the identities and roles assigned to individuals within the narrative, signalling to the audience which figures are positioned as legitimate, pioneering, or institutionally endorsed (Fairclough 1992).

The second dimension, discursive practice (Interpretation), turns the analyst's focus toward the processes and conventions that guide how such texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted. Here, one must consider the routine practices, editorial policies, and media strategies that determine what stories are told, how they are assembled, and whose voices are brought to the fore. Crucially, this level of analysis interrogates not just who is allowed to speak, but how readers are positioned are they constructed as passive recipients, active participants, or communal insiders? For instance, a platform may routinely amplify authoritative voices or insiders while marginalising dissent or alternative perspectives, thereby shaping audience expectations and interpretive habits (Fairclough 1992).

Finally, the dimension of social practice (Explanation) situates these textual and discursive routines within the broader sociocultural context. This means examining how discourse is deeply imbricated in the maintenance, reproduction, or transformation of institutional hierarchies, established norms, and prevailing values. In the context of motorsport, this includes analysis of how language and representation either reinforce or

challenge gendered boundaries and other social divisions. Critical discourse analysis at this level reveals not only the micro-level strategies for legitimation and boundary-drawing within texts, but also the macro-level discursive shifts that may signal changing institutional attitudes or evolving processes of inclusion, exclusion, and recognition. For example, shifts in how female participation is framed in motorsport narratives may indicate a move toward genuine legitimation, or alternatively, may serve as superficial gestures that leave longstanding structures largely intact (Fairclough 1992).

3.2 Key Analytical Terms in This Thesis

3.2.1 Discursive construction

Discursive construction refers to the process by which meaning, identity, relationships, and events are actively produced through language and representation (Fairclough 1995, Wodak & Meyer 2001). In this thesis, the primary lens for examining how institutional actors, such as F1 Academy or Formula 1 team accounts, and audiences construct understandings of female drivers' legitimacy, agency, and belonging is used. It encompasses how the choice of words, images, and narrative framing constitutes particular "versions of reality" (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002).

3.2.2 Representation

Representation concerns the depiction and positioning of social actors, identities, and relationships in discourse, along with their associated ideological meanings (Hall 1997, Fairclough 2003). Here, representation is used to examine how female drivers are portrayed, whether as competent and authoritative athletes, as pioneers in a male-dominated sphere, or

as marginal figures. The way these depictions are structured reflects power relations embedded within motorsport's order of discourse.

3.2.3 Agency

Agency describes the degree to which individuals are depicted as active, influential participants or as passive subjects within discourse (van Leeuwen 1995). The analysis considers how agency is attributed to or withheld from female drivers, and how this aligns with or challenges broader gendered power structures in motorsport media narratives.

3.2.4 Ideology

Ideology is understood here as the set of implicit values, assumptions, and belief systems embedded in discourse that serve to maintain or challenge existing power relations (van Dijk 1998, Fairclough 2003). In motorsport contexts, ideological positioning can legitimise or undermine the presence of women and influence perceptions of their authority.

3.2.5 Normalisation

Normalisation refers to the process by which certain roles, practices, and identities become perceived as natural, routine, or unremarkable through repetition and the erasure of difference (Fairclough 2003). In this project, normalisation refers to the extent to which female participation in motorsport is integrated into everyday competitive practice, rather than being viewed as an exceptional occurrence.

3.2.6 Intertextuality

Intertextuality describes the ways in which texts draw upon, reference, or embed other discourses, genres, or texts (Fairclough 1992, Kristeva 1986). Within this thesis, it is used to trace how social media posts and online commentary incorporate references to mainstream F1

media, cultural narratives about gender, or prior sporting events, thereby situating women's racing within broader discursive frameworks.

3.2.7 Assumption and presupposition

Assumptions and presuppositions are elements of language that present certain ideas as taken for granted, thereby revealing underlying ideological positions (Fairclough 1995, van Dijk 1993). In the texts examined here, such presuppositions can include implicit beliefs about what constitutes "real" motorsport or about women's potential for progression to higher-tier series.

3.2.8 Order of discourse

The order of discourse refers to the socially and historically shaped configuration of discourses and genres operating within a specific social field (Fairclough 1992, 2003). In the context of motorsport, it refers to the dominant discursive structures that define how drivers, competitions, and success are discussed, and against which the F1 Academy positions itself.

3.2.9 Semiotic grammar

Semiotic grammar, following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), refers to the visual design principles through which meaning is constructed in multimodal discourse, including composition, colour, gaze, and spatial organisation. In the analysed content, semiotic grammar encompasses podium photography, driver close-ups, team branding, and sponsor visibility, all of which contribute to the representation and normalisation of female athletes.

3.2.10 Modality

Modality relates to the degree of certainty, authority, or commitment a text projects toward its propositions (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, Fairclough 2003). Linguistic and visual markers of high modality in promotional content convey strong truth claims that assert value and

legitimacy, whereas lower modality in audience discourse can signal doubt, evaluation, or conditional support.

3.3 Rationale for Exclusive Use of CDA

Limiting the theoretical framework to CDA ensures methodological coherence and analytical depth. CDA's layered structure enables the transition from granular textual analysis to meso-level consideration of discursive norms, and ultimately to macro-level interpretation of cultural and institutional power. This holistic approach is especially suited to addressing the central questions of this thesis: how media discourse participates in the constitution, negotiation, and contestation of gendered legitimacy and authority in motorsport (Fairclough 2003, Fairclough 1992).

4 Methodology

This thesis uses a qualitative research design. It centres on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its main methodological approach. CDA, here defined as a method for studying the relations between discourse and power in society, explores how legitimacy (the perceived right to participate), representation (how women are portrayed), and authority (the ability to influence or lead) for women in elite motorsport are constructed, contested, and negotiated, focusing on the F1 Academy as a case study. CDA is chosen because it interrogates both the overt textual and visual content of media and the underlying structures of power, ideology, and social practice that shape meaning and influence how sporting narratives are received (Fairclough 1992, Wodak & Meyer 2015).

The research uses Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, examining: (1) the textual dimension, including language, imagery, and rhetorical strategies; (2) discursive practice, covering how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted across digital and

institutional networks; and (3) social practice, placing motorsport discourse within patterns of gender, authority, and cultural change. This structure enables the thesis to transition smoothly between detailed micro-level analyses and broader macro-level contexts.

4.1 Data Collection

The thesis draws on both institutional and audience-generated materials. Institutional data includes F1 Academy's Instagram posts, website updates, press releases, race reports, promotional videos, features, interviews in affiliated media outlets, and the Netflix documentary. These materials highlight key points in F1 Academy's promotional strategy and self-representation, including season launches, notable race weekends, and major sponsorship or partnership announcements.

Audience discourse is collected from public comment threads on F1 Academy and F1 social media posts, Reddit discussions in motorsport-focused subreddits like r/F1FeederSeries, and selected commentary from major motorsport journalism platforms. Screenshots of extended comment conversations offer nuanced insight into how legitimacy, authenticity, and inclusion are negotiated among fans and critics. The sampling strategy focuses on periods of increased visibility and engagement such as the debuts of Netflix series, race recaps, and controversial announcements to capture a wide range of perspectives.

4.2 Sampling Strategy

This study uses purposive sampling to represent both institutional and public perspectives. Official posts are chosen for recurring discursive themes of empowerment, progress, and normalisation. Audience responses are sampled for diversity of tone and viewpoint. These capture supportive, resistant, and skeptical attitudes about F1 Academy and its broader effect on motorsport's gender order. Comment sections are sampled systematically, focusing on

threads with significant interaction, diverse arguments, and references to legitimacy, gender roles, or structural barriers.

This dual approach creates a dynamic data set. It covers both top-down, strategic messaging and bottom-up, organic discourse. The study examines institutional efforts to shape perception and legitimacy, while also tracking audience reactions, contestations, and resignifications as part of the public negotiation process.

4.3 Analytical Procedure

The CDA process uses multiple iterative stages. First, textual analysis highlights linguistic features, narrative structures, rhetorical devices, and visual indicators in both institutional and audience-generated texts. This includes examining key terms like “trailblazer,” “role model,” “opportunity,” and “separation,” and looks at multimodal strategies such as the use of images, hashtags, and emotive content. Next, discursive practice analysis explores how messages circulate and are engaged with or responded to in digital spaces. It focuses on patterns of affirmation, debate, resistance, and reinterpretation.

Ultimately, the thesis situates its findings within the broader social context of motorsport. It connects micro-level discourse to macro-level institutional reforms, commercial interests, and cultural meanings. The analysis pays close attention to discursive tensions, where the meanings and value of gender initiatives are challenged, reframed, or defended in public dialogue. This illuminates how legitimacy and authority are built through ongoing negotiation.

4.4 Considerations

Data collection and analysis adhere to the ethical standards for social media and online research. All data comes from public forums or platforms. The process prioritises privacy, anonymity, and respectful representation. When direct quotes or user-generated content are

used, care is taken to prevent unnecessary exposure or identification, especially in sensitive or controversial contexts. Findings are interpreted with critical awareness of power dynamics in both institutional communication and audience discourse. The study strives to treat all perspectives fairly.

By combining comprehensive data collection, targeted sampling, and rigorous Critical Discourse Analysis, this methodology creates a sophisticated understanding of how legitimacy, representation, and authority for women in motorsport are constructed, challenged, and transformed in the era of F1 Academy. It provides a transparent and replicable framework for examining the evolving discourse on gender in elite racing. The methodology links institutional strategy and audience negotiation, both textually and contextually, for a nuanced scholarly contribution.

The methodological choices in this thesis reveal ongoing negotiations over meaning, legitimacy, and authority in elite motorsport. The CDA approach shows that inclusion and exclusion are not fixed or one-directional. Instead, they are built through continual interaction between institutional narratives and public discourse. This positions the thesis as a critical study of gender, media, and sport. It also lays the groundwork for future research that will follow and challenge the boundaries of representation and equity in global cultural contexts.

5 Analysis: Media Representation of the F1 Academy Versus Male-Dominated Series

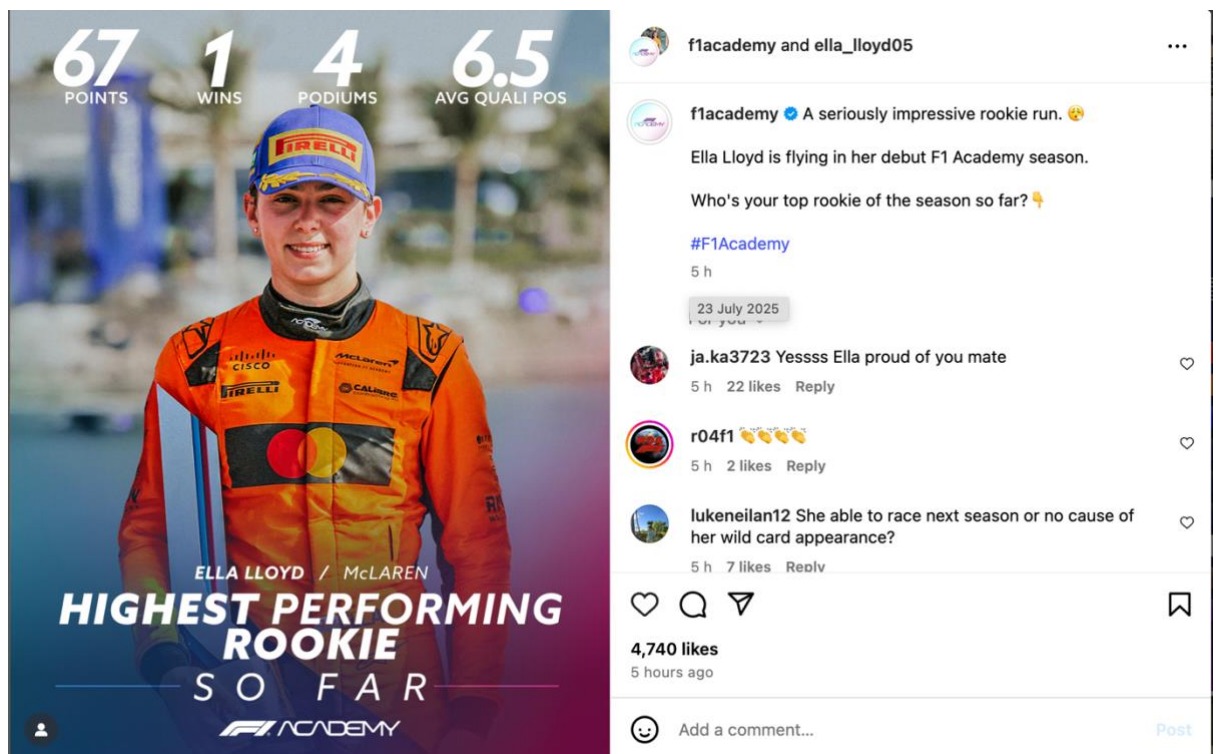
This study examines how the F1 Academy is represented in the media compared to male-dominated racing categories. To do this, recent Instagram content and narrative media were analysed. Specifically, Instagram posts from the official F1 Academy, Formula 1, Formula 2, and Formula 3 accounts were included. In addition, selected driver and journalistic accounts

were reviewed, along with episodes of Netflix's F1 Academy docuseries. The analysis involved coding content for narrative frames, gendered language, visual focus, and the balance between performance- and personality-driven storytelling. The dataset comprises Instagram posts collected between March and August 2025. Each post and episode segment was analysed following established media studies methods. Building on these methods, preliminary findings reveal clear differences in portrayal. For example, F1 Academy coverage highlights drivers as pioneers and "trailblazers." It often references firsts, personal challenges, and historic milestones. Furthermore, posts and episodes emphasise empowerment and emotional journeys. They position drivers as role models as much as competitors. In contrast, Formula 1, 2, and 3 coverage focuses on race performance, skill, and competition. References to gender are minimal. Visuals also diverge. F1 Academy content frequently shows podium celebrations, community engagement, and inclusive messaging. Formula 1 prioritises dynamic race scenes, overtakes, and technical prowess. Collectively, these patterns suggest F1 Academy media coverage foregrounds novelty, emotion, and social impact. Male-dominated series, on the other hand, emphasise sporting merit and rivalry. This divergence reflects broader trends in sports media and informs the following analysis of how such representations shape perceptions of women in motorsport.

5.1 Instagram posts analysis

The way women are represented in motorsport media, especially on platforms like Instagram, offers insight into how gender norms are maintained or challenged. By examining F1 Academy's Instagram posts, as well as those from drivers and posts tagged with F1 Academy, this analysis explores linguistic framing, stereotype reinforcement, and implications for gender equity in high-performance sports. This approach follows current scholarly frameworks in sports media, gender, and symbolic representation.

A close reading of the July 23, 2025, Rookie Spotlight post featuring Ella Lloyd highlights the construction of athletic identity. The post draws the audience's attention to Lloyd's "seriously impressive rookie run," (app. 1) incorporating an action photograph that frames her within the competitive narrative of motorsport. The language omits overt gender markers such as female driver or breaking barriers, instead utilising the neutral and standardised term rookie.



Appendix 1 (F1Academy, July 23rd, 2025)

This discursive move exemplifies the process described in Critical Discourse Analysis, wherein media language shifts emphasis from gendered exceptionality toward normalised, performance-based evaluation (Fairclough 1992). Through these linguistic and visual choices, the representation of Lloyd moves away from her characterisation as a novelty or symbol. She is instead positioned as an active competitor, evaluated by the same standards as in mainstream sporting discourse. CDA highlights how such features contribute to the reconfiguration of legitimacy. This enables female athletes to be discursively integrated into

the established domain of sporting achievement. Choosing an action image, rather than a passive or emotional scene, further foregrounds Lloyd's agency and professional competence, reinforcing her position as a legitimate participant within motorsport (Fairclough 2006).

Further deepening the analysis, the post's interplay of text and imagery also exemplifies normalisation as described by Fairclough (2003). By describing Lloyd's performance as "seriously impressive" and focusing on her "rookie run" (app. 1) without highlighting her gender or the novelty of her achievement, the post participates in making female excellence appear routine within the context of F1 Academy. This move signals a discursive strategy aimed at shifting audience perception from viewing female drivers as anomalies to seeing them as integral competitors. They are subject to the same evaluative metrics and celebratory language traditionally reserved for male athletes.

Presupposition appears in the language and structure of the post. The question, "Who's your top rookie of the season so far?" (app. 1) assumes a group of credible, comparable competitors. It suggests that Lloyd's achievements can be measured alongside those of others and presents her as part of a legitimate athlete cohort. This kind of presupposition helps women become embedded in motorsport meritocracy (Fairclough, 1992, van Dijk 1993). Through natural language, the audience is encouraged to see female participation as routine and unremarkable. This is a crucial step in redefining gendered expectations.

The post also demonstrates order of discourse: the arrangement of genres and styles that define what is "sayable" and "recognisable" in motorsport media (Fairclough 1992, 2003). The usual order marks women's achievements as "historic" or "groundbreaking," but here it is subtly changed. By utilising performance-based genres that highlight wins, podiums, and statistics, the F1 Academy account effectively blends women's racing discourse

with mainstream discourse. This integration challenges the older norm of gender-marked storytelling. It shows a broader cultural shift toward female athletes.

The post employs semiotic grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) through an action photograph and professional-style graphics, showcasing Lloyd's results. The composition emphasises action, achievement, and her link to McLaren. This visually aligns her with motorsport's success codes. The color scheme and layout mirror those of the Formula 1 brand. This further supports the legitimacy of female athletes by embedding them in the visual language of elite sport. These multimodal strategies work with the text to present Lloyd as a top competitor and a normalised figure in motorsport.

Modality is also important. The statement "Ella Lloyd is flying in her debut F1 Academy season" (app. 1) shows strong certainty and commitment to Lloyd's ability (Fairclough 2003. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). This construction sets the account as authoritative and leaves little room for doubt. Such language helps build athletes' legitimacy and strengthens audience trust in women as top performers.

Elements of intertextuality appear in the hashtags (#F1Academy) and tagging @ella_lloyd05, @McLaren. These link the post to wider digital and sporting conversations. Referencing the Academy and its partners connects Lloyd's success to broader campaigns for the professionalisation of women's motorsport. Intertextual referencing signals to the audience a larger shift in authority, legitimacy, and achievement and who can now claim them.

At the level of textual analysis, the post's vocabulary including "seriously impressive rookie run" and "flying in her debut" (app. 1) and emphasis on statistical metrics deliberately mirror mainstream sporting discourse used for male athletes. By avoiding language such as "female rookie" or "breaking barriers," the post participates in the broader discursive normalisation of

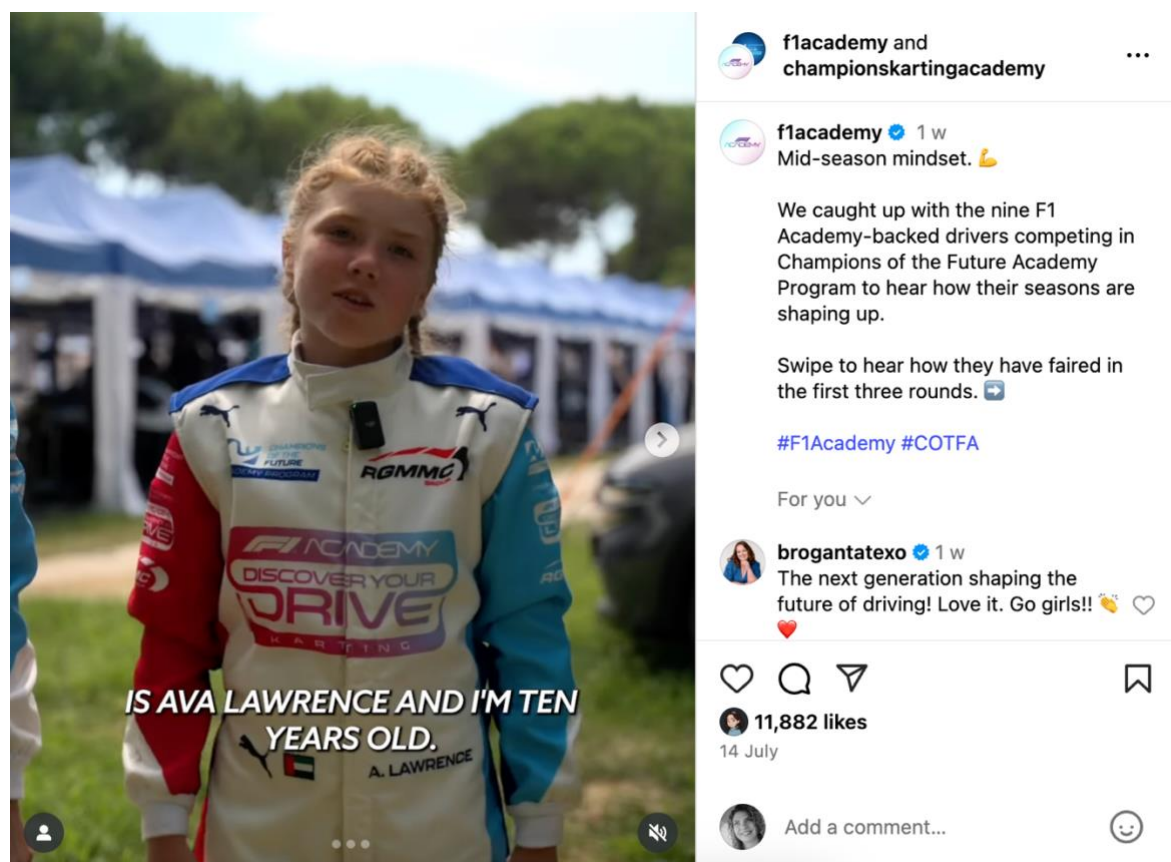
women in motorsport. This word choice operates as a performative act, presenting Lloyd's merit as self-evident within the competitive domain and reshaping expectations for discussing women's performances across the sport.

Focusing on discursive practice, the institutional strategy behind engaging the audience, "Who's your top rookie of the season so far?" (app. 1) transforms followers from passive spectators into co-authors of new motorsport norms. This engagement is not trivial; it helps shift public perception from "women as special cases" to "drivers as peers." The act of producing, circulating, and encouraging comments that treat Lloyd as part of a competitive cohort, rather than a lone exception, means the boundaries of insider/outsider status are being redrawn in real time. Here, the reason is that these media routines actively cultivate a discourse community in which women's achievements are debated on equal footing, disrupting historic conventions that once required women's legitimacy to be continually explained or doubted.

At the level of social practice, the post's design, statistics, and branding within the McLaren context not only reflect but also push against entrenched boundaries of gender in motorsport. By embedding Lloyd's success in the visual grammar and data-centric logic universally valued in racing, the post intersects with wider struggles over the definition of sporting authority and belonging. Why is this important? Because it means that practices once reserved for men, such as statistical celebration, visual iconography, and brand association, are being extended to women, signalling a broader institutional and cultural reckoning with historic exclusion. Each time these codes are used for a woman without special pleading or novelty framing, the social field is incrementally changed: the post both benefits from and contributes to an evolving order of discourse in which gendered boundaries are not just discussed but actively negotiated and transformed (Fairclough 1992).

Through Fairclough's model, therefore, the Ella Lloyd post emerges as a concrete, consequential site of discursive change, not just a generic celebration. The textual, discursive, and social features identified are embedded in and act upon real processes of audience perception and institutional evolution. This ensures that the analysis is not merely taxonomic or descriptive, but demonstrates how language, media practice, and cultural context converge to redefine the possibilities for legitimacy and authority in elite motorsport.

Turning to the July 14, 2025, this post, the content features nine F1 Academy drivers in the paddock, accompanied by direct quotations reflecting their personal and collective ambitions. Thematically, the post emphasises values such as teamwork, perseverance, and strategic focus qualities widely valorised in elite sports discourse and conventionally attributed to male athletes in both media and academic analyses.



Appendix 2 (F1academy, July 14, 2025)

While the mention of “F1 Academy-backed drivers” (app. 2) acknowledges a distinct collective female identity, the narrative grants substantial agency to the athletes themselves. Through first-person quotes and candid depictions of preparation, the athletes are framed as professionals invested in their own development and competitive goals. This represents a calculated shift in the type of female driver depicted within F1 Academy’s media coverage. Instead of falling back on clichés that have plagued the media's portrayal of women’s sport in the past (lines about heartache, hardship, and wanting things), this approach leans into agency, competence, and aspiration. Considerable agency is offered to the drivers themselves throughout the examined posts, as seen in first-person quotes and unvarnished portrayals of their preparation and routines. This narrative strategy actively disrupts simplified representation by presenting athletes as ambitious and dedicated to their own athletic development, professionals who are driven by the desire to achieve and improve rather than recipients of care or opportunities. The posts are intentionally gender-neutral, with an emphasis on merit, ambition, and competitiveness, as illustrated by captions such as “mid-season mindset” (app. 2) or reports on how each driver’s season is progressing. All of these serve to add support for their belief that they are part of one universal sporting story with their male contemporaries. This recoded representation follows from scholarship suggesting that, rather than marking their difference and separation, athletes’ voices should be amplified and included in mainstream sports coverage. Yet the frequent applications of collective identifiers, such as F1 Academy-backed, demonstrate that differentiation still applies, as institutions continue to present drivers as breaking a separate path towards visibility in a historically enclosed profession. In practice, these shifts represent gains toward equity, and the discourse analysis that follows suggests that institutional shifts should be scrutinised not only by their counting of “more” but also in terms of a broader story they reconstitute. The

intention isn't to tick boxes but to have genuinely fair and everyday coverage. So, this new representation matters because it deserves to represent women's capabilities; it reflects changing media logics; and meets the change in gender equality within motorsport's institutions. This mode of representation resists reductive tropes that have often circumscribed female athlete coverage, such as the overemphasis on emotional vulnerability or external validation, and aligns more closely with the academic recommendation to platform athletes' voices and competencies.

Both posts exemplify a discernible shift from stereotype-laden media portrayals where women are depicted through adversity, novelty, or overt difference toward a more sophisticated integration into the universal sporting narrative. The strategic absence of gendered language and the frequent use of performance-oriented themes indicate an intentional narrative recalibration, consistent with recent calls in the media studies literature for more equitable and normalised sports coverage. Yet, while merit and ambition are foregrounded, subtle markers of differentiation persist. The continued collective framing "F1 Academy-backed" (app. 2) highlights the ongoing process of negotiating visibility and recognition in a historically exclusionary context. This supports intersectional perspectives in sports and media scholarship, which caution that institutional initiatives, while necessary, must be critically evaluated for their capacity to deliver substantive narrative equity, rather than simply tokenistic exposure. These evolving representational strategies bear direct consequences for gender equity in motorsport at multiple levels:

Performance-based narratives are actively challenging the long-standing association of motorsport with masculinity, creating new opportunities for the public to view female drivers primarily as elite athletes. This narrative shift not only alters public perception, enabling audiences to recognise and celebrate women for their skill and competitive merit, but also carries significant institutional implications. As the normalisation of female athletic

achievement becomes embedded in digital media, it can reshape how sponsorship decisions are made, how governing bodies set priorities, and how recruitment pathways are structured, collectively weakening historical structural barriers to women's participation. Furthermore, as digital storytelling platforms like Instagram increasingly reach broader and younger demographics, the strategic recalibration of narrative focus has the potential to act as a powerful catalyst for wider cultural change within the motorsport ecosystem. In this context, performance-centred representation in digital media becomes both a driver and a marker of progress, facilitating greater legitimacy, opportunity, and acceptance for women throughout motorsport.

The post embeds presuppositions that reveal deeper ideological shifts. By asking followers to “hear how they have fared in the first three rounds,” (app. 2) it presupposes that these girls' results are naturally of interest to the audience, just as results from any male-dominated motorsport program would be. The phrase “F1 Academy-backed drivers” (app. 2) assumes the legitimacy of this cohort within the established motorsport hierarchy, taking for granted that a collective of young women competing at this level is an ordinary, newsworthy feature rather than an anomaly. This presupposed normalcy is a subtle but important step toward integrating women into the taken-for-granted routines of elite racing discourse. As Fairclough (1992) suggests, presuppositions are never ideologically neutral; by embedding certain assumptions as “given,” they contribute to the naturalisation of new social norms. In this instance, the language of the post helps reframe women's participation as ordinary and legitimate, embodying the broader CDA insight that discursive choices both reflect and produce shifts in cultural values.

The post also actively works toward normalisation by positioning its subjects, nine young female drivers, within the routine rhythms of the racing season. Phrases like “mid-season mindset” and the specific reference to the “Champions of the Future Academy

Program” (app. 2) perform a discursive alignment, placing these drivers in direct continuity with the standard calendar, pressures, and developmental milestones of mainstream motorsport. The visual depiction of many girls together, all in racing gear, further chips away at the notion that female participation is rare or exceptional, visually and linguistically affirming that their presence and ambition are ordinary parts of the sport.

By adopting the established conventions of sports media, including statistical summaries, quotations, and season updates, the post contributes to a broader shift in the order of discourse (Fairclough 1992, 2003) of motorsport. The text merges the language, visual grammar, and participatory indicators typical of male-dominated racing reporting with content about female athletes. This blending does not just update the representation of girls in motorsport; it incrementally repositions what is “sayable” and “recognisable” as normal, gradually recalibrating the boundaries of who counts as a central subject in motorsport storytelling.

The coordinated use of imagery showcasing drivers in the paddock, wearing official uniforms, and engaging in pre-race rituals taps into the semiotic grammar of elite sport (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). These visual indicators, including formation, professional attire, and a backdrop with sponsor logos, anchor the drivers within the symbolic world of high-level competition, lending them the same credibility and institutional status typically reserved for their male counterparts. This visual alignment is critical: it means that female athletes are framed not only as participants, but as central and expected actors in the unfolding drama of motorsport. In addition to linguistic and narrative framing, scholarship in visual semiotics emphasises that the visual representation of athletes through group formation, professional racing attire, and the use of sponsor backdrops also plays a crucial role in constructing legitimacy and centrality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Such visual indicators do more than simply portray participation; they operate as markers of authority and routine belonging

within the symbolic landscape of high-level sport. Recent work on sports media representation notes that presenting female athletes within these established visual grammars can help challenge the exceptionalism or marginalisation often found in both textual and visual coverage, contributing to their normalisation as expected actors in elite motorsport (Cuneen, Ridinger, and Ross 2009, Matthews and Pike 2016).

Although less foregrounded, the post's use of hashtags such as #F1Academy and references to programs like "Champions of the Future" (app. 2) engages with broader intertextual networks, connecting this digital moment with other, ongoing initiatives and conversations in motorsport. This helps situate the athletes and the program within a wider field of meaning that extends beyond the boundaries of a single post, reinforcing the evolution of female visibility across multiple sporting arenas and institutional narratives.

At the textual level (Fairclough 1992), the post's language and visual arrangement foreground values such as "teamwork," "perseverance," and progress during the season, using terminology and a structure that highlights rounds and quotes athletes, directly mirroring mainstream, male-coded sports reporting. By referring to "F1 Academy-backed drivers" (app. 2) and their competitive status in a regular "program," the post's textual features actively position these girls within the normalised grammar of elite racing. This is important to note because it's not simply reporting results; the choice to use established sporting lexicon, such as mid-season and shaping up, linguistically integrates female participation into the habitual rhythms of motorsport, contributing to new expectations for legitimacy and centrality.

Zooming out and looking with the lenses of discursive practice (Fairclough 1992), the post's production and circulation practices using multi-image slides, soliciting audience engagement "Swipe to hear..." (app. 2), and leveraging direct athlete voice signal a deliberate effort to engage both institutional actors and the broader public in a new kind of

participatory discourse. User @brogantatexo's comment "The next generation shaping the future of driving! Love it. Go girls!!" (app. 2) is evidence that audiences actively take up and reproduce the narrative of routine female achievement. This is important to note because this isn't just institutional branding; it is an invitation for the motorsport community to co-construct new norms around who belongs and who gets celebrated. Through these shared routines, the boundaries of the insider/outsider distinction are being redefined in everyday social media encounters.

At the broadest level, and with a focus on social practice (Fairclough, 1992), the post must be understood in relation to historical gendered hierarchies within motorsport, a social order in which women's presence has long been marginal, marked, or otherwise excluded. Through textual celebration, participatory structure, and visual indicators of credibility such as racing suits and professional backdrops, the post functions as a meaningful intervention in the wider social order. This is important to note because each time the post is read, liked, or shared, it incrementally participates in contesting or recalibrating the gender boundaries that define who is understood as a legitimate, central figure in the sport. This is not merely representational "window dressing"; it contributes to the ongoing renegotiation of the very structures of social legitimacy and authority in motorsport culture.

The July 24, 2025, post featuring the tagline "Back with the girls in F1 Academy @flacademy @proracingmotorsport..." (app. 3) is emblematic of an affirmative collective identity. The language directly highlights camaraderie and unity among female competitors, with "girls" functioning as both a marker of inclusiveness and a reinforcement of group belonging. Visually, the post depicts moments of group celebration and mutual encouragement within the paddock, further amplifying the theme of community. This approach aligns with recent research suggesting that positive depiction of female athlete

community can build confidence, enhance visibility, and counteract narratives of isolation or frailty often perpetuated in sports media (Cuneen, Ridinger, and Ross; Howe et al.).



Appendix 3 (Joanneciconte, F1academy, July 24, 2025)

However, this collective emphasis also reveals underlying complexities: while it asserts the legitimacy of a distinct women's racing cohort, it may inadvertently sustain the perception of separation between women's and men's motorsport. The explicit invocation of gender "back with the girls" (app. 3) establishes pride in female participation yet also highlights the persistence of parallel narratives rather than full integration with the mainstream.

This post participates in a process of normalisation (Fairclough 2003) by presenting women's collective presence and camaraderie in the paddock as both ordinary and positive.

The language “Back with the girls in F1 Academy” (app. 3) assumes that a group of female racers belongs in this elite space, a routine that works to rewrite the history of women as outsiders or rare exceptions within motorsport. The depiction of laughter, unity, and casual joy among the drivers in the video visually situates these moments as typical elements of the racing weekend, not as unusual or special occurrences. This ongoing normalisation is discursively significant because it frames women’s belonging as self-evident, challenging both historical exclusion and the expectation that their presence must be explained or justified (Fairclough 2003).

The post presents a multifaceted representation of the athletes, portraying them not only as competitors but also as a supportive and empowered community. The widespread tagging of multiple drivers and teams, along with the highlighting of group celebrations, enables a narrative that transcends individual achievement, embedding each racer within a network of friendship and shared purpose. This is crucial in a sport often criticised for isolating women or casting them as tokens; here, agency and community are foregrounded, lending visibility and institutional status to women’s collective experience (Hall 1997, Fairclough 2003).

The casual style of the caption presupposes an audience familiar not only with the drivers but with the concept of women’s racing teams as a familiar feature in the paddock. By stating “Back with the girls in F1 Academy,” (app. 3) the post assumes, rather than asserts, that female group participation is commonplace. This unstated assumption embedded discursively reflects a shift in what is no longer seen as novel, evidencing the subtle work of integrating female athletes into the routines and memories of motorsport audiences (Fairclough, 1992).

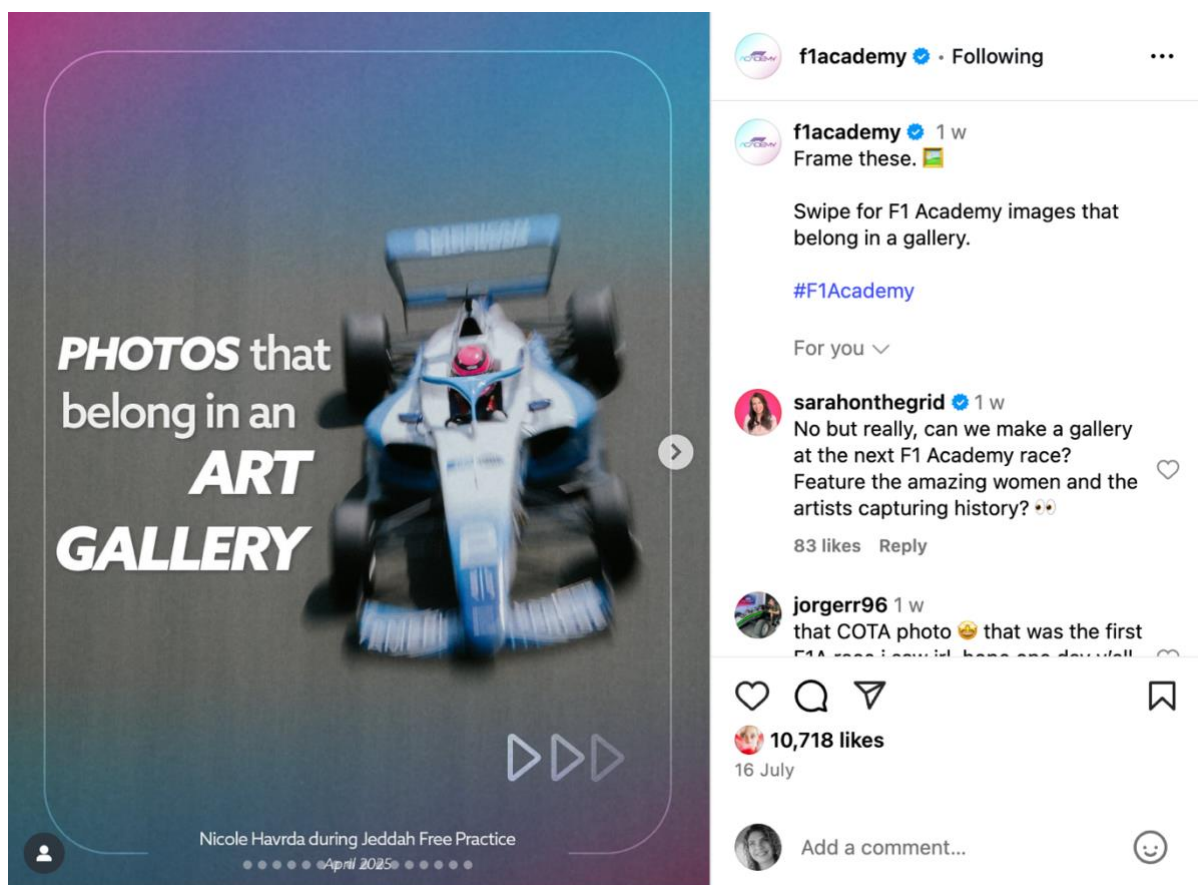
Looking at the post through the lenses of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, first with textual analysis, then discursive practice, and lastly social practice (Fairclough 1992).

The repeated use of familiar, casual language "Back with the girls," (app. 3), team mentions, emotive commentary in the comments, and the absence of explicit markers of novelty or exceptionality position the female racers as integral to the paddock environment, which helps highlight the textual analysis (Fairclough 1992). The textual choices, particularly the collective "girls" (app. 3), anchor the athletes as both peers and insiders, shaping reader perception through language that is both inclusive and habitual.

With a focus on the discursive practice (Fairclough 1992), the production and sharing of this post involve tagging teams, drivers, and official accounts, visually centring women within motorsport's broader digital ecosystem. The interactive dimension, evidenced by supportive and playful comments, "Maya looks like the older sister who got talked into doing this by her younger sisters" (app. 3), demonstrates that audiences are also "doing the work" of normalisation, engaging with, echoing, and amplifying the vision of a collective, legitimate female presence. The routine sharing of such images and captions helps to establish community and belonging as standard themes in both institutional and user-generated discourse.

In the broader sociocultural context and social practice (Fairclough 1992), this post intervenes in the historical marginalisation of women in motorsport by providing both visual and textual evidence of their social and sporting legitimacy. The visible friendship among the drivers in the video, specifically not staged but apparently spontaneous, signals to a wider audience that motorsport's gender boundaries are shifting. Rather than functioning as a site of isolated achievement or token representation, the post supports a redefined order of discourse where female solidarity, joy, and presence are central, and where the cultural landscape of motorsport is opened to sustained, normalised female participation.

In contrast, the July 16, 2025, post, inviting viewers to “Frame these. 🖼️ Swipe for F1 Academy images that belong in a gallery. #F1Academy,” (app. 4) exemplifies a different mode of gender representation. Here, the focus shifts toward the artistic and athletic merit of F1 Academy’s athletes, presenting their accomplishments and dramatic moments as inherently worthy of admiration. The gallery motif and selection of action-based, emotion-rich imagery signal an intent to position these drivers within the established visual culture of elite motorsport, a narrative space historically reserved for male athletes (Matthews and Pike 2016). Crucially, this post employs gender-neutral language, deliberately using terms like “female driver” or explicit novelty framing. This strategy works to normalise women’s presence, allowing their performances to stand beside those of their male counterparts without perpetual reference to their gender.



Appendix .4 (F1academy, July 24, 2025)

Collectively, these posts reveal a dual strategy within F1 Academy's media output. On one hand, there is a purposeful affirmation of female community and identity, providing visibility and recognition to women who have long been marginalised. On the other hand, there is a conscious move toward performance-centred, normalised representation, wherein female athletes are appreciated for their sporting skills and aesthetic contributions to racing culture. This duality reflects a transitional moment in gendered sports media, where representation is expanding beyond merely countering absence or novelty, toward a more integrated, multidimensional portrayal that includes both community and excellence.

From a gender equity perspective, such strategies are significant. As literature suggests, representation that oscillates between community celebration and performance valorisation can challenge entrenched stereotypes while also negotiating the risks of “othering” and marginalisation (McCarthy et al. 2022, Howe et al. 2022, Matthews and Pike 2016). By engaging both the unique identities of women racers and their universal qualities as athletes, these posts contribute to ongoing shifts in media narratives and audience perceptions. The process remains iterative, and occasional emphasis on collective femininity can coexist with moves toward normalised coverage, but the trend toward richer, more complex digital storytelling is evident.

Importantly, these findings align with the recommendations in current scholarship, which advocate for multi-layered approaches to media representation: foregrounding sporting merit, providing authentic athlete voices, and reimagining visual and narrative frames for inclusion and equity. While challenges remain, especially around the persistent boundaries between women's and men's sporting domains, the direction signalled by these F1 Academy posts advances the conversation and, potentially, the cultural reality of gender parity in motorsport media.

This post helps normalise the recognition of female drivers by using the “gallery” motif to establish their athletic and artistic merit as deserving of attention, without highlighting gender as exceptional. Action images, expressive photos, and invitations to “Frame these” (app. 4) integrate female athletes into the daily visual and cultural practices of elite motorsport. This normalisation is reinforced by omitting gender labels and regularly showcasing women’s achievements. Their presence is not treated as a spectacle, but rather offered for appreciation. As a result, this discourse shifts perceptions of who and what is considered “gallery-worthy” in racing culture (Fairclough 2003).

Framing the athletes’ performances as “belonging in a gallery” (app. 4) gives the drivers both representational dignity and agency. They are depicted not as marginal figures or tokens of diversity, but as proactive subjects. Their skill, emotion, and moments of glory are equal to historical images of male achievement. The interactive call to “swipe for images” (app. 4) amplifies their agency. It positions viewers as co-curators, empowered to help build a new visual narrative that centres women (Hall 1997, van Leeuwen 1995).

The post’s visual structure uses the principles of semiotic grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Action shots foreground speed and competence. Compositional choices echo classic motorsport photography. Strategic use of lighting, blurred backgrounds, and branded racing suits anchors the visuals. Together, these elements encode the drivers’ legitimacy as iconic subjects on par with established male stars. They embed women’s performance within motorsport’s highly codified aesthetic system.

By telling the audience to “frame these” and labelling the images as “belong[ing] in a gallery,” (app. 4) the post signals that women’s racing moments deserve attention, preservation, and celebration. This silent assumption marks a key discursive shift. The narrative does not plead for inclusion. It simply presents women’s sporting imagery as art and

history. It presumes the audience is ready to accept and even desire this new normal (Fairclough, 1992).

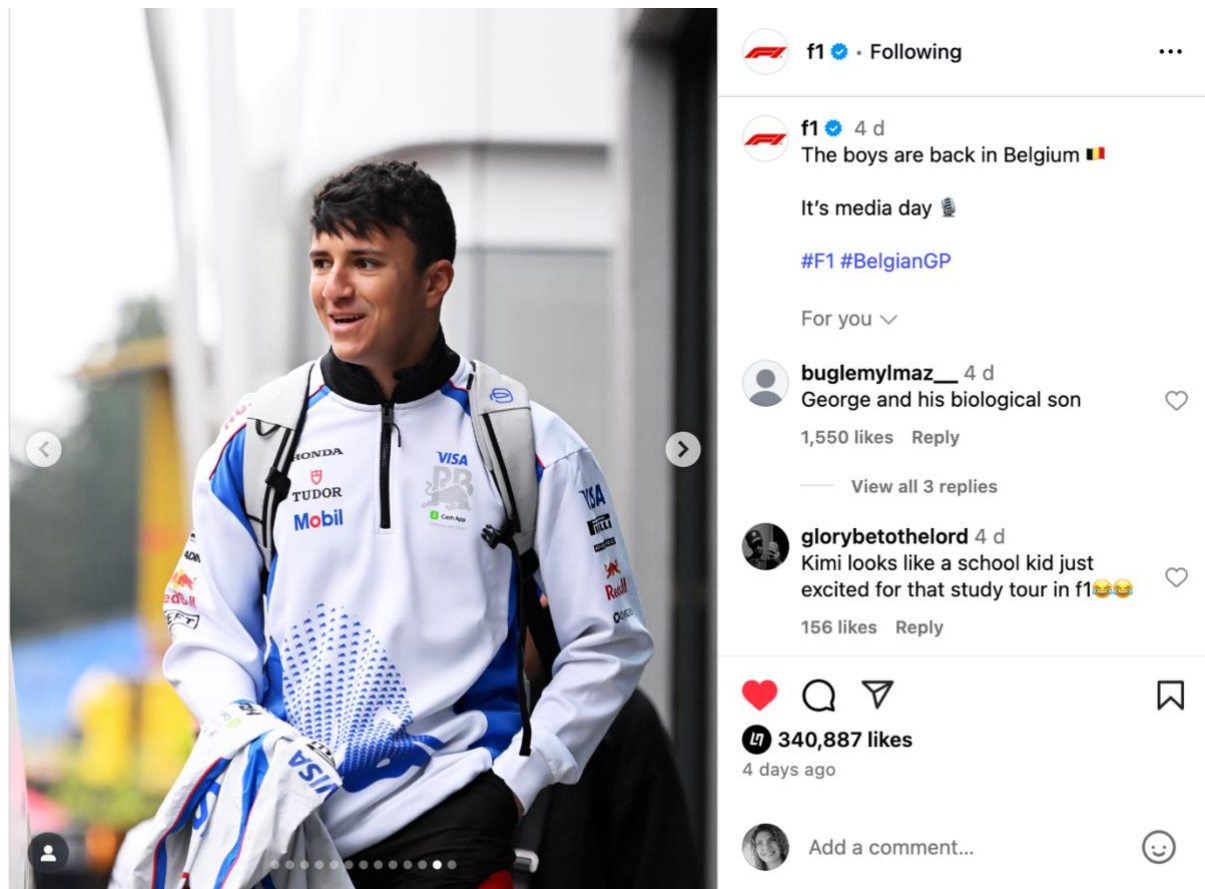
In the post's textual analysis (Fairclough), the language stands out for its artistic and inclusive register. The caption present women's achievements as remarkable in their own right, without invoking gendered novelty. The use of imperatives and direct address makes the athletes' performances both visually impactful and central within motorsport discourse.

The multi-image carousel, hashtag #F1Academy, and audience comments, such as "can we make a gallery at the next race?" (app. 4), demonstrate the discursive practices that shape the post's creation and circulation. Viewers are prompted to see these drivers as icons. The conversation that follows actively creates new norms, treating women's moments as foundational, not supplementary, to motorsport storytelling.

Socially, the focus on "belonging" alters both the sport's visual representation and its gender hierarchy. By making female athletes natural gallery subjects, the post contests the historical marginality of women in racing. It models a social reality where women's achievements are as central to motorsport heritage as those of male drivers. This is not a mere depiction. It is an active effort to redefine who matters and what is worth remembering in racing's cultural landscape.

This post encapsulates the routine and tradition associated with the return of Formula 1 drivers to an iconic circuit. The phrase "the boys are back" (app. 5) effortlessly signals camaraderie and a return to normalcy. Male presence in the paddock is presented as so ordinary and uncontested that identity does not require explanation. The interpretation that male presence in the paddock is presented as so ordinary and uncontested that identity does

not require explanation is grounded in both linguistic and visual indicators present in the post.



Appendix 5 (F1, July 24, 2025)

“The boys are back” (app. 5) functions on several levels: linguistically, it employs casual, colloquial language that presumes shared audience familiarity not only with the drivers but with the assumption that this group, men, are the rightful, expected actors in this space. There is no elaboration, justification, or framing of their presence as unusual, newsworthy, or requiring institutional support. Visually, the image shows the drivers informally interacting during routine media activities, effortlessly embedded within the paddock environment. There are no markers of surprise, novelty, or exceptionality: the drivers’ actions and body language reflect ease, ownership, and historical continuity.

This sharply contrasts with posts about “the girls” (app. 3). As shown earlier, the language “back with the girls in F1 Academy” (app. 3) and visuals focus on group celebration and collective naming. There is an emphasis on camaraderie or empowerment. In these posts,

the presence of females is still marked and commented on, even as it becomes more normalised. This is because women in elite motorsport are still a recent development. The difference lies in how the male drivers' presence is backgrounded, routine, and unremarkable, while the presence of women remains foregrounded and narrated. This claim comes directly from observable differences: in grammar, with straightforward assertion versus marked group identity; in content, with focus on normalcy versus collective celebration; and in audience position, with assumed belonging versus invited recognition of inclusion. The "boys are back" (app. 5) post does not require the discursive work of legitimation or marking seen in the "the girls" posts (app. 3). Its ordinariness stems from a longstanding, gendered discourse where male legitimacy is inherited and quietly maintained through patterns of representation and omission.

The post's tone is casual and confident, reinforcing the idea that the space rightfully belongs to them and has always been so. The visual indicators, as well as the drivers interacting during official media obligations, help build the impression of inherited legitimacy, where achievement and community don't need to be narrated or marked. This post exemplifies gendered normalisation and presupposition in action. The phrase "the boys are back" (app. 5) not only invites celebration of the drivers' return but treats their presence as routine in the paddock. In linguistic terms, normalisation here means that the presence of male drivers is seen as usual and unremarkable, woven into motorsport's expected experience (Fairclough, 2003). Such language makes male participation appear so common that it doesn't require discussion or defence, a presupposition that this is how it always has been (van Dijk 1998, Fairclough 1992). In contrast, posts about the girls use language and visuals to highlight gender and group identity, showing their still-contested position.

The post also supports motorsport's traditional norms about who counts as an insider. By describing the male drivers' return using casual language and visuals (routine actions, comfort in the paddock), the post shows that male presence is the natural baseline. This "backgrounded" approach helps keep gender privilege unremarkable and invisible within the sport (Fairclough 1992, 2003).

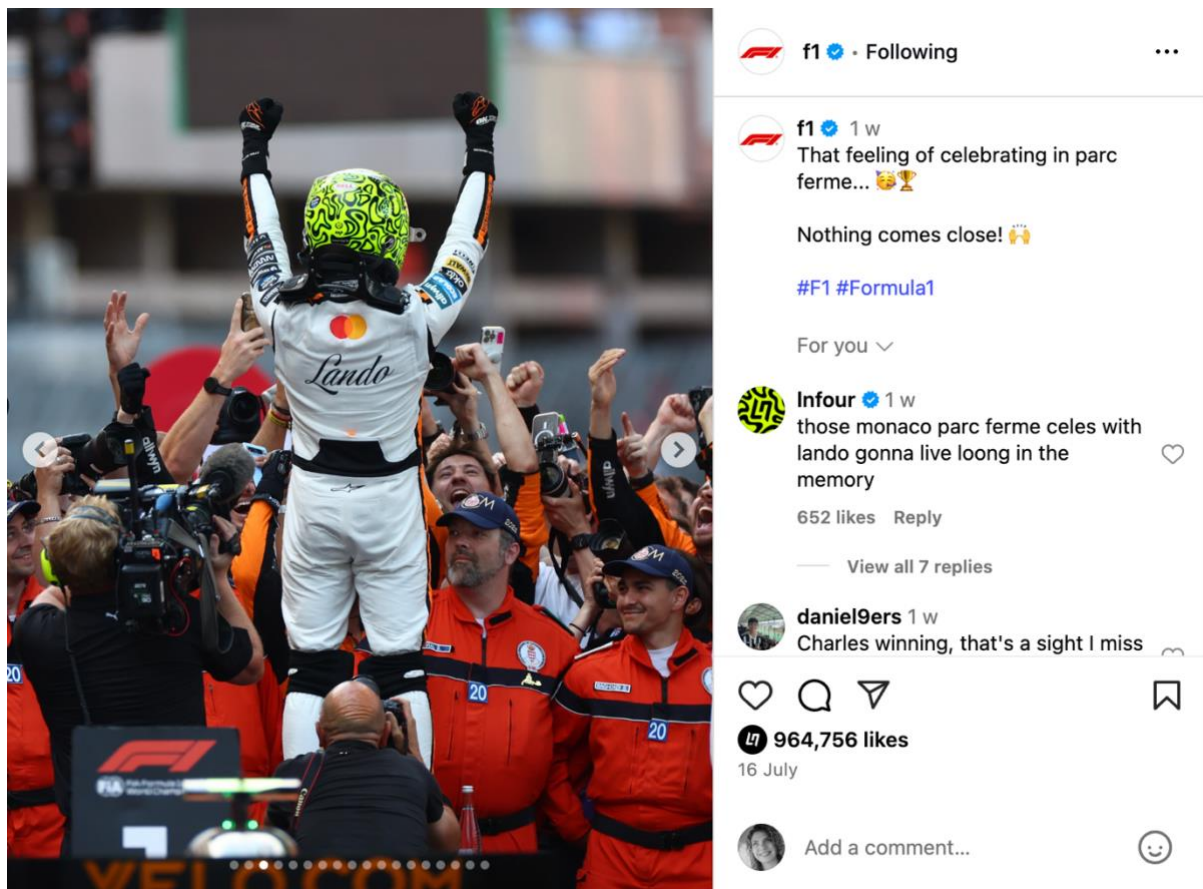
Fairclough's framework demonstrates how the phrase "the boys are back," (app. 5) its grammar, and its informal style convey an impression of inherited legitimacy and routine. There are no language markers of gender or exception, signalling that maleness is the unmarked norm. Posts about girls, by contrast, highlight group membership as newsworthy. The communicative approach here is to create content that signals unity and tradition by making the male drivers' return enough to excite the community, without elaborate explanation. This contrasts with the visible efforts for women in app. 5.1.5 with Fairclough. Fan comments also show enthusiasm without mentioning gender or legitimacy, indicating alignment between the institution and the audience in normalising men's status. In terms of social practice, showing male drivers without comment reinforces motorsport's historic gender boundaries. The post does not challenge but confirms existing hierarchies, men stay at the centre, their participation so normal it becomes invisible. Wodak and Meyer (2001) refer to this as a quiet mechanism of power, one that perpetuates gender inequality by omitting discussion rather than debating. This makes it harder for new identities, such as women racers, to feel equally included, as their presence must still be highlighted.

This post is not just a neutral celebration of the driver. Text, discourse, and social practices work together to reinforce the normalised presence of male drivers, while also highlighting the discursive effort still required to make women's presence feel equal. This shows that gender hierarchy is maintained both by what is said and what is left unspoken.

By comparison, the F1 Academy post, “Back with the girls in F1 Academy,” (app. 3) focuses on a community with a gendered aspect. It portrays group return as significant, making the girls both visible and exceptional. The F1 narrative hides gender through routine, but the F1 Academy highlights it through markedness and solidarity. This promotes empowerment, but also reminds the audience that female belonging still needs confirmation. F1 drivers are simply back, “The boys are back in Belgium. It's media day. #F1 #BelgianGP” (app. 5), while F1 Academy drivers must celebrate and assert their presence. This post is interpreted as a deliberate act to make female athletes visible and exceptional in a community that often overlooks or underestimates their contributions. The caption, “Back with the girls in F1 Academy,” marks the group’s return as a significant event. It communicates that their participation is both distinct from and more noteworthy than that of their male counterparts. Standard F1 updates treat male participation as routine and unremarkable, for example: “The boys are back in Belgium. It’s media day. #F1 #BelgianGP” (app. 5). In contrast, this post highlights gender using markedness and solidarity. It acknowledges the athletes’ existence, celebrates their presence, and empowers them. This demonstrates that their continued participation is a notable achievement. At the same time, the post reminds the audience that female inclusion in motorsport still requires explicit affirmation and community confirmation. Thus, their belonging remains both celebrated and continually negotiated within the sporting landscape.

This second post is pure celebration, a moment of driver and team glory after a Grand Prix. “That feeling of celebrating in parc ferme... 🏁🏆 Nothing comes close! #F1 #Formula1” (app. 6) elevates victory and its emotional reward, presenting celebration as both routine and central to F1. The lack of context, with no explanation of whose celebration or its

significance, highlights how normalised competitive success is for male athletes. Images of embrace, jubilation, and trophies visually affirm legitimacy and communal triumph.



Appendix 6 (F1, July 16, 2025)

This post presents normalisation through male victory and celebration as routine, requiring no explanation. The phrase “Nothing comes close!” (app. 6) omits any reference to who is involved, assuming viewers share the same cultural memory of F1. This reliance on shared assumptions signals that legitimacy is so deeply attributed to male drivers that their successes become the standard of measurement (Fairclough 2003, van Dijk 1998).

Visual framing, embraces, jubilant gestures, and the use of trophies employ the semiotic grammar of elite sport to reinforce legitimacy and evoke emotion. Familiar celebration poses, joyful expressions, and specific spaces like parc ferme all visually signal that success is both deeply emotional and officially recognised. These visual cues help make male achievement in F1 feel natural and widely expected (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006).

On a textual level, emotionally charged language, such as “That feeling... Nothing comes close!” (app. 6), alone conveys the core meaning, assuming the audience already identifies with F1 victory rituals. There are no markers of novelty or legitimacy; the accomplishment stands as self-evident, showing male success as the baseline in F1 discourse.

The post's discursive (Fairclough 1992) format perpetuates a shared set of communicative conventions, such as a short caption, a trophy emoji, and a race hashtag, which signal routine, communal knowledge of celebration. User @Infour comments “those Monaco parc ferme celes with Lando gonna live loong in the memory” (app. 6) echo this sentiment, showing how interaction reaffirms these ordinary, desirable moments for male athletes. Focusing on social practice, this post preserves and strengthens F1's discourse boundaries: men's victories are both celebrated and expected, building on a long tradition. There is no need to exert extra effort to justify, narrate, or explain male success. It is simply presumed to be central to the sport's culture and identity. This stands in sharp contrast to the F1 Academy “gallery” post, where women's achievements still need explicit framing for recognition. This contrast shows that male dominance remains unchallenged in what is seen as natural and highlighted in elite motorsport (Fairclough 2003).

By comparison, the F1 Academy's gallery-themed post, “Frame these.  Swipe for F1 Academy images that belong in a gallery” (app. 4), aims both to celebrate and seek recognition. Curating images as gallery-worthy raises F1 Academy performances to the level of art and spectacle, connecting their visual style to the tradition of elite motorsport. However, the language still conveys a sense of newness; these moments are highlighted not as routine but as efforts to gain visibility and aesthetic appreciation. By prompting viewers to frame these images, the post subtly suggests that audience recognition of these achievements is still being developed, rather than assumed.

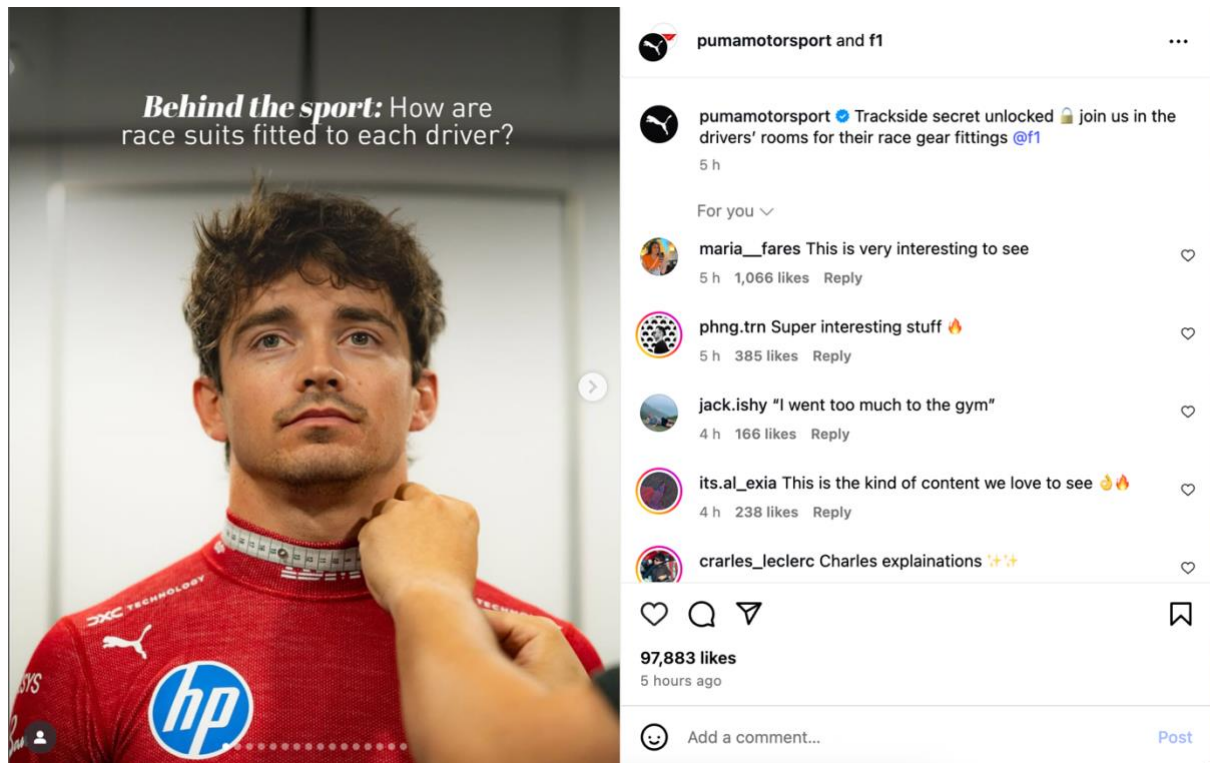
By encouraging viewers to frame these images, the post asks them to go beyond passive appreciation. It invites the audience to become active participants in legitimising women's accomplishments in motorsport. The command "Frame these" (app. 4) is a call to action, prompting followers to add value, memorability, and prestige to moments from the F1 Academy. This is a form of discursive labour, unlike with male athletes, recognition of female achievement requires conscious support from both the institution and its audience.

This approach stands in sharp contrast to established F1 content, where iconic moments are shown and their meaning is assumed. In the F1 Academy context, framing both literally and figuratively emphasises that recognition and value for these achievements are not yet firmly rooted in motorsport's tradition. Highlighting curation as gallery-worthy underscores that athletes' legitimacy, visibility, and contribution still need active audience involvement to be normalised. The post shows that, for women in motorsport, public recognition is not automatic; it must be earned, named, and ritualised through explicit acts of communication.

The distinctions in both comparative pairs are clear. Formula 1 posts demonstrate the power of normalcy: male athletes are central to the sport's narrative and do not require additional context. Their camaraderie and celebrations are traditions, not rare events. The F1 Academy, by contrast, still presents its presence as a triumph, its celebrations as milestones, and its visual identity as seeking audience validation. Even as performance-focused language and imagery become more common, subtle signals of difference, such as naming, inviting, and framing, persist. This transition is central to my thesis. The F1 Academy rapidly moves toward the main sporting narrative, but full equality is still shaped by continual work, naming, justifying, and marking presence. Men's participation and triumphs remain the default storyline. Gender equity in motorsport media will depend on making top performance and belonging ordinary for all athletes. Only then will their stories and celebrations stand

unmarked yet fully recognised. The name “F1 Academy” suggests more than a racing series. It signals Formula 1’s commitment to developing talent, offering opportunities, and implementing systemic change. By using “F1,” the series positions itself in the sport’s tradition, backing its legitimacy and direct link to premier motorsport. “Academy” emphasises education, structured growth, and preparation showing it is more than competition. This program intends to nurture the next generation of female talent. Overall, the name promises to address barriers for women, establishing a path from grassroots to elite racing. It aims to make women’s presence routine and ambition normal, while openly challenging structures that have limited participation and recognition.

This carousel post invites followers backstage into the drivers’ rooms to observe their race gear fittings. “Trackside secret unlocked 🔒 Join us in the drivers’ rooms for their race gear fittings @f1” (app. 7), the tone is playful and exclusive, with phrases like “secret unlocked” and the direct address “join us” (app. 7) fostering a sense of privileged access. The imagery depicts drivers preparing for competition, donning custom-fitted suits, gloves, and boots, and engaging with both team personnel and each other outside the focused intensity of the racetrack. These elements foreground the drivers’ agency: they are depicted not as passive recipients of team directives, but as active participants overseeing their preparation, even as rituals and institutional routines shape their actions (van Leeuwen 1995).



Appendix 7 (Pumasport, F1, July 29, 2025)

The narrative constructs F1 drivers as both elite athletes and relatable personalities. Fans are invited to share intimate, insider moments with them. The imagery humanises the drivers and demystifies their preparation, yet also reinforces their central protagonist status access to these rituals is presented as a rare treat. The drivers, crew, and fans are all seen as invested in the pageantry and technical precision needed for this level of competition. Gender and identity are unmarked: all drivers shown are men, and their routine presence requires no justification or narrative elaboration. This differs from previous examples, which explicitly mark gender with phrases like “the girls in F1 Academy” or default to masculinity with “the boys are back.” Here, drivers are presumed to be male unless stated otherwise, but this post employs a notably gender-neutral register. It focuses on backstage access and routines instead of gender. Phrases like “trackside secret unlocked” and “join us in the drivers’ rooms for their race gear fittings” (app. 7), which create intimacy and insider status without directly referring to gender. The language emphasises privilege, exclusivity, and routine over gendered

exceptionality. Sharing behind-the-scenes content normalises these routines as central to the F1 experience, while audience engagement amplifies the desirability of elite access. This gender-neutral framing helps reinforce sporting hierarchies, positioning drivers as universally legitimate, rather than exceptional or barrier-breaking figures.

Interpreting the post through Fairclough's model highlights how discourse can alternately mark or erase gender, depending on narrative choices and institutional aims. Gender-neutral backstage content upholds mainstream legitimacy, while gendered posts foreground issues of representation and inclusion. The contrast reveals how F1's digital presence constructs different kinds of legitimacy depending on whether gender is at the centre or left in the background. Authority and belonging are inherited, and the behind-the-scenes view only deepens audience loyalty to the sport's established icons.

The Formula 1 post inviting fans "trackside" for drivers' race gear fittings offers privileged access to elite competition rituals. The playful, insider language and direct address create immediacy and intimacy (Fairclough 2003). The post uses informal phrases like "secret unlocked," "join us," and "behind the scenes" (app. 7) to set an insider tone. These choices, along with the direct address, make the experience seem special, exclusive, and participatory. Language and rhetorical strategy invite the audience to be privileged spectators. This creates shared intimacy and access, marking drivers as elite yet relatable (Fairclough 109). The playful, exclusive mood supports a core message of normalisation: these usually private, behind-the-scenes moments are now familiar to F1's global audience. Normalising backstage access reinforces fan loyalty and legitimises the driver (Fairclough 2003). Teams share backstage content strategically to foster fan loyalty and highlight the human aspects of elite sport. The post invites comments and increases likes, building a collective interpretation that these moments are authentic and desirable. Editorial decisions to share "insider" posts position drivers as approachable celebrities while reinforcing transparency and engagement

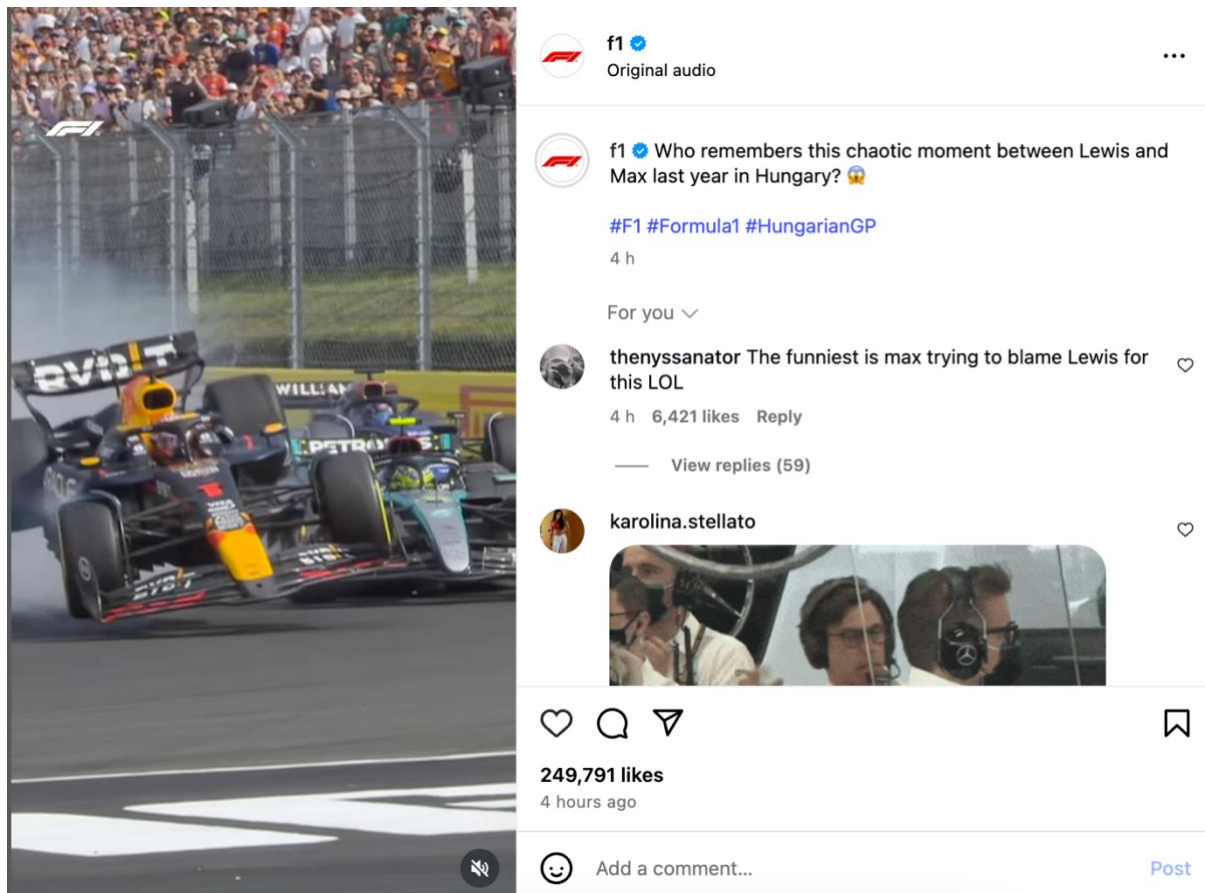
(Fairclough 1992). At the social practice level, these moves reinforce motorsport hierarchy, making elite drivers seem approachable yet exceptional. Their pressures and privileges are constructed as natural (Fairclough 2006). By making drivers' pre-race rituals visible, the post shapes what legitimacy and professionalism mean in Formula 1. It keeps access a hallmark of elite sport, but carefully mediates who belongs at the centre. This social practice dimension reveals how the discourse of access, ritual, and performance upholds broader norms and hierarchies in motorsport, determining who is visible, whose routines are celebrated, and which identities are established as central in the sporting world (Fairclough 2003)

The invitation, "Trackside secret unlocked... join us," (app. 7) explicitly centres the notion of visibility as both a privilege and a signifier of legitimacy: fans are positioned as insiders witnessing exclusive content, reinforcing the cultural value of access and backstage revelation in elite motorsport (Kian et al. 2011). All featured drivers are male, and their centrality in the narrative is so unquestioned that neither the post's tone nor its imagery needs to explain or justify their authority or belonging. The emphasis on personal quirks, meticulous preparation, and camaraderie reminds fans that, while F1 drivers are extraordinary athletes, they are also standard-bearers for the sport, automatically granted both intimacy and status.

When compared to F1 Academy's post (app. 1), a nuanced difference appears. Ella Lloyd's performance on track is celebrated with enthusiasm matching Formula 1's athletic focus. However, even with performance at the centre, the tone still hints at a sense of novelty. Lloyd's "seriously impressive rookie run" (app. 1) is recognised for sporting merit and as part of the evolution of women's racing. Participation and access to the spotlight are subtly framed as new, historic, and significant within F1 Academy, not an unremarkable given. The word "rookie" is central to this discussion. It does more than label a first season it frames participation as both an achievement and a novelty. In it, "rookie" not only recognises

Lloyd's performance, but also shows her efforts as “new,” “historic,” and “exceptional,” especially in women's racing. Describing Lloyd's run as a “seriously impressive rookie run” celebrates her merit, but also links her success to narratives about the evolution of gender inclusivity in motorsport. Textually, “rookie” signals difference: being new in this world is noteworthy. Access and recognition are treated as milestones, not a norm, in F1 Academy. By spotlighting “rookies,” the discourse celebrates performance but also frames female participation as novel and significant, not naturalised. Female athletic legitimacy requires recognition and commemoration, unlike that of their male counterparts, who are often normalised. Thus, the term “rookie” in F1 Academy posts helps shape visibility, legitimacy, and history for women in motorsport.

This post features a vivid action image and a retrospective caption spotlighting a notorious, divisive on-track incident between Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen during the previous year's Hungarian Grand Prix: “Who remembers this chaotic moment between Lewis and Max last year in Hungary? 🤯 #F1 #Formula1 #HungarianGP “ (app. 8). The phrase “Who remembers...?” and the shocked emoji invite collective memory and passionate fan debate, casting this collision as a pivotal event in F1 history. The imagery focuses closely on the cars, the turmoil, and the drivers' proximity during the crisis. The post dramatises and mythologises rivalry as a central element of the Formula 1 experience. It presumes audience familiarity with motorsport history. The post foregrounds competitiveness, danger, controversy, and the personalities at the heart of the championship storyline. Gender remains unaddressed, as there is no mention of belonging, with male participation being presumed as the standard in F1. The narrative focuses solely on sporting stakes and intense emotion, lacking broader themes of inclusion or advocacy.



Appendix 8 (F1, July 29, 2025)

The infamous Hungarian Grand Prix clash between Hamilton and Verstappen exemplifies how F1 media ritualises rivalry. The caption and image quickly evoke a sense of collective recognition and emotional investment among fans. Participation and stakes are presented as givens; rivals drive the drama and F1's ongoing mythos.

In contrast, the F1 Academy's post (app. 2) emphasises teamwork and ambition, mirroring Formula 1 content through its focus on preparation, drive, and group unity. The context encompasses not only performance but also the ongoing pursuit of inclusion, visibility, and legitimacy in top-tier motorsport. Drivers' ambitions and perspectives are foregrounded in a way that signals the developmental, institution-building mission of the F1 Academy. The term "backed" signals that a driver's achievements in F1 Academy are institutionally supported, not presumed or expected, highlighting that legitimacy, opportunity, and visibility

for women in motorsport are not assumed in the way they are for elite male drivers. Instead, these achievements are often depicted as resulting from special endorsement, development, or advocacy. By using “backed,” the post marks female drivers as exceptional and still not fully integrated into the mainstream of the sport. The need to specify “Academy-backed” contrasts sharply with Formula 1’s main page, where male participation requires no such qualifiers.

Thus, “backed” points to the ongoing negotiation of women’s legitimacy and the extra rhetorical effort needed to validate their presence and success in F1 Academy.

Side by side, these posts demonstrate how Formula 1 and F1 Academy media differ in their discursive construction of belonging and legitimacy. In Formula 1, access and rivalry fit a long-standing tradition of routine participation. Participation, drama, and athleticism are taken for granted, as evidenced by unmarked language and imagery. Legitimacy is presupposed and reproduced by tradition.

F1 Academy, even as it adopts a performance-driven and professional appearance, continues to engage in additional rhetorical work to identify and contextualise its achievements. This work includes explicit references to progress, group identity, and landmark events. While posts such as app. 5.1.1 and app. 5.1.2 demonstrate progress toward normalisation, the language and imagery still suggest an active transformation rather than established inclusion. Each celebrated ambition or result remains verbally and contextually tied to broader conversations about women’s increasing but not yet fully secured status in the sport.

From a CDA perspective, Formula 1’s discourse operates in a stable structure where authority and inclusion are continuously reinforced without question, while F1 Academy’s discourse exposes an arena where legitimacy is in flux. The former preserves existing power dynamics by relying on implicit assumptions of inclusion, while the latter constructs meaning with explicit elaboration, mirroring the broader practice of redefining boundaries in

motorsport. Genuine parity will be achieved when F1 Academy drivers are portrayed in routine sporting contexts—preparation, drama, rivalry without added qualifiers, so their participation is recognised as equally central and unremarkable as that of their Formula 1 counterparts.

The Instagram post of the Hamilton-Verstappen crash in Hungary shows normalisation. Elite male participation is neither highlighted nor explained. Instead, it is considered an integral part of the sport's structure. The language and imagery assume shared audience knowledge, making the presence of male drivers seem routine and unremarkable. The order of discourse maintained by Formula 1 media is clear in how legitimacy and inclusion are woven into posts about male drivers, which always function within set limits where institutional status is taken for granted. In contrast, F1 Academy content, such as “Mid-Season Mindset,” must perform additional linguistic work to build legitimacy, repeatedly citing progress, affiliations, or pioneering achievements to validate women's roles in the sport.

This disparity is evident: the main F1 channel mythologises rivalry and skill using phrases like “Who remembers this chaotic moment...?” (app. 8), evoking sporting history and dramatic competition, while F1 Academy frames each accomplishment as a milestone for gender legitimacy, using explicit terms such as “Academy-backed” or “making history” (app. 2). As a result, women's successes remain tied to social meaning, unlike the routine portrayal of men's competition. These differences are intentional, shaped through discourse: every word and visual in the F1 post, from the emotive appeal for fan memory to the tightly focused action image, positions male drivers as natural leads, needing no explanation. Meanwhile, F1 Academy's explicit elaboration and framing underscore the ongoing process of defining who “belongs” and how participation is constructed in the motorsport industry.

Both posts show the effortless normalisation of elite, mostly male presence in Formula 1. Whether offering privileged views of pre-race routines or invoking iconic rivalries to engage fans, these posts never justify why these athletes are central; inclusion is presumed, participation is unqualified, and achievement is defined by competition or skill. Fans are invited to remember and invest in a tradition where legitimacy goes unquestioned. This sharply contrasts with F1 Academy media, where posts about preparation or breakthrough often highlight both accomplishment and the broader context of gendered inclusion. F1 draws its mythology from the routine centrality of male protagonists, shaping the sport's media boundaries of belonging and celebration.

On April 23, 2025, the official F1 Academy Instagram account announced the global premiere of its Netflix docuseries with the caption:

“F1: THE ACADEMY, a new 7-part docuseries produced by Reese Witherspoon's @hellosunshine, follows female drivers as they battle it out across the 2024 F1 Academy season. Premiering 28 May, only on Netflix” (app. 9).



Appendix 9 (Netflixuk, F1academy, April 23rd, 2025)

This post enacts a discursive construction where female drivers are central agents who negotiate sporting legitimacy through struggle and achievement. Drivers join this construction. For example, @abbipulling wrote, “Ah, can’t wait to watch this! I wonder who is in it...👀👀” (app. 9b). Her comment adds a playful yet authoritative insider view, signalling athlete engagement with the narrative on their terms. Fan comments like “Finally!” and “Representation matters! Let’s go F1 Academy!” (app. 9) echo the institutional narrative and express collective pride and belonging. This post exemplifies discursive construction by showing how meaning, identity, relationships, and events are produced through language and representation (Fairclough 1992, Wodak & Meyer 2001). When the narrative frames female drivers as “battling it out,” it shapes their identity as competitors and underscores the legitimacy of their participation. Here, legitimacy operates as an institutional attitude or

legitimation process, explicitly negotiated in discourse, rather than being automatically granted (Fairclough 2003). This discursive construction reveals the institutional work in positioning female athletes as authentic subjects in elite motorsport. “Battle it out” (app. 9) gives agency and authority, placing women in language typically reserved for elite male athletes.

Mentioning Reese Witherspoon and Hello Sunshine adds intertextuality, connecting motorsport to broader women-centred storytelling and expanding the sport's discourse. The multimodal composition of the post, which includes podium images, driver close-ups, and dynamic race visuals, draws on the semiotic grammar of Formula 1's media conventions, further embedding F1 Academy drivers within the codes of high prestige sporting representation. This visual arrangement acts to normalise female participation and moves the discourse beyond tropes of novelty or exception.

Using CDA, the post and its comments operate at three levels: textual, discursive, and social practice. Textually, female athletes are positioned within a sports discourse that is modelled on men's competition, both in language and visuals. In discursive practice, teams, athletes, and fans collaborate to create and negotiate meaning, and who gets to speak reflects the evolving power dynamics. At the social practice level, Instagram becomes a platform for wider discussion about women's place in motorsport, where their participation is both normalised and debated. Institutional support from F1 teams helps legitimise female athletes, embedding their stories into the heart of global motorsport culture. As a result, female achievement moves from the sidelines to the mainstream, though ongoing efforts are needed to secure full gender equality in the sport. Discursive practice emerges in the comment field, where institutional actors, drivers, and fans each find a voice. Official team accounts such as @mercedesamgf1 post, “So excited to see it 🍊🍊🍊,” @haasf1team writes, “This is going to be good! 🏠,” and @stakef1team adds, “Can't wait to see @carrieschreiner on the big

screen ” (app. 5.1 9b-c). These comments endorse the series institutionally and recontextualise it within the legitimacy structures of professional motorsport. Their contributions reinforce agency and recognition, integrating F1 Academy into the sport's symbolic hierarchy. Meta commentary reveals reflexivity about inclusion and the ongoing ideological negotiation of recognition and authority in women's sport. Here, meaning production becomes active contestation and productive legitimacy in the digital public space. Fairclough's first level of textual analysis reveals that terms like “battle it out” and iconic winning poses contribute to the construction of legitimacy for female drivers (Fairclough 1992). Calling the series a “battle” uses the established language of competition, while images of women on podiums assert their belonging and capability. These features make female agency visible and central. Second, discursive practice shows that comment patterns, hashtags, and reposts amplify select voices and shape legitimacy and normalisation. Engagements like “So excited to see it” (app. 9c) and endorsements from F1 teams and fans, such as “Representation matters! Let's go F1 Academy!” (app. 9) demonstrate that discourse circulates among the Academy, institutional actors, and audiences. This dynamic recirculation reinforces women's legitimacy and normalisation in sports (Fairclough 1992). Third, social practice signals a wider shift in institutional and fan expectations, intervening in gendered boundaries in motorsport. The normalisation and recognition of female authority signal evolving legitimisation processes (Fairclough 2003). Public and institutional support help move representation from the margins to the mainstream, fostering genuine cultural change.

Normalisation is emphasised, especially through recurring images and language that embed women within F1 coverage. Visual tropes, such as podium celebrations and dynamic race imagery, help “normalise” the female presence, shifting it from novelty to a standard expectation (Fairclough 2003). Rather than anomalies, these athletes' roles become routine

and expected, showing how repeated representation in familiar genres shifts audience expectations over time.

The order of discourse, “socially and historically shaped configuration of discourses and genres operating within a specific social field” (Fairclough 1992), is reconfigured in the post. Linking motorsport with gender equality and mainstream entertainment (via Hello Sunshine and Reese Witherspoon) expands F1’s storytelling narratives and genres, challenging boundaries of belonging.

Representation is directly foregrounded. Fan and institutional comments, such as “Representation matters! Let’s go F1 Academy!” (app. 9) and official endorsements, do more than show support; they remake the visual and discursive landscape by “assessing what is foregrounded and what is marginalised” (van Leeuwen 2008). Thus, representation is not secondary but a contested, central terrain, turning visibility into legitimacy and contested presence into normalisation.

The F1 Academy Instagram post from June 7th, 2025, announces its new Netflix docuseries with the caption: “The reviews are in: F1: The Academy is the series to watch. 🏁🏁 #F1TheAcademy #Netflix #HelloSunshine #F1Academy.” (app. 10) The image features a collage of press quotations and headlines. The post utilises critical acclaim as a means to legitimise the series, incorporating outside reviews to demonstrate its cultural significance. For example, it includes headlines like “More grit than glitz in female motorsport’s answer to Drive to Survive” and “Susie Wolff: ‘F1 is not a man’s world anymore.’”(app. 10a). These headlines are carefully chosen to portray the Academy in a positive light, borrowing credibility from respected media outlets. According to Fairclough, this is a strategy known as discursive re-embedding: the promotional post leverages the authority of entertainment journalism and sports news to bolster its legitimacy.



Appendix 10 (F1academy, July 7th, 2025)

The multimodal design, juxtaposing bold review pull-quotes with F1 Academy branding and the Netflix logo, operates within the semiotic grammar of prestige promotion. It assimilates the representational style of Formula 1 launch content but reframes it to centre women as the default reference point, rather than the exception, signalling an intended reordering of motorsport's discourse. By presenting acclaim as a self-evident fact, "the series to watch" (app. 10) rather than as a contested assertion, the post invites its audience to accept female-centred motorsport narratives as matters of cultural consensus.

Through textual analysis, it is evident how the caption and collage, "The reviews are in F1 Academy is the series to watch," (5.1.10) juxtaposed with reviews and bold headlines, images of female athletes, and the prominent use of logos, all function to build, normalise, and legitimise female racing as a standard and celebrated aspect. Discursive Practice

shows the meaning of the post is negotiated and expanded in the comment field, as when fans demand details about career pathways “can they go to f2 etc... Girls Rule and we need MERCH!” (app. 10), question gender comparisons to men in F1, or critique soundtrack choices “the girlies deserve better than wannabe influencer backing tracks!” (app. 10). This interactivity shows that legitimacy, agency, and representation are continually co-produced and debated in open discourse. Social Practice demonstrates how the post and its multifaceted uptake reveal that normalisation and legitimacy are ongoing, collective endeavours. Official messaging, critical engagement, and audience demands about how women and their stories are constructed and promoted together push the field toward recognising women racers as routine, central, and authoritative, not simply “added” for diversity’s sake. The discursive practice element is most visible in the comment field, where a diversity of voices, from enthusiastic supporters to reflexive critics, negotiate the meaning of the post’s celebratory framing. The top-ranked comment by @mtysl reads: “Loved it but would have like a little more detail.... like where do they go next and can they go to f2 etc...I know I can look it up but I like details! How did they get picked etc...Girls Rule ❤️ and we need MERCH!” (app. 10). This enacts a supportive yet interrogative stance, affirming the value of the series “Loved it... Girls Rule” (app. 5.1.19) while simultaneously calling for greater institutional transparency about pathways to higher categories “can they go to f2 etc” and suggesting commercial expansion “we need MERCH!” (app. 10).

In CDA terms, the commenter participates in the co-construction of meaning, reinforcing the legitimacy of the athletes while pressing for further integration into motorsport’s elite structures. The demand for pathway clarification directly impacts the social practice dimension: audience recognition of women’s competitive legitimacy is linked to perceived mobility into male-dominated spheres, such as Formula 2 and Formula 1. Other supportive comments, such as “Loved every minute of it!” and “Showed my daughter she’s

so inspired!” (app. 10), explicitly frame the series as socially consequential. These utterances embody representation as social practice, positioning the on-screen stories as vehicles for intergenerational inspiration and as challenges to the historical gender exclusivity of motorsport. The ideological dimension here is clear: the series is valued both for its entertainment content and for its capacity to reconfigure cultural norms around who belongs on the grid.

Not all contributions uncritically reproduce the promotional narrative. One viewer observes: “The show is great, but the insistence on focusing SO MUCH on comparing to the men in F1 is wrong. Men and women are different, and that's ok. The focus should be on getting women interested in racing and helping them achieve their full potential” (app. 10b). This introduces a counter-discursive position, rejecting the comparative frame embedded in both the series and wider motorsport commentary. The commenter calls for a re-centring of the discourse around women’s autonomous competitive trajectories rather than continual benchmarking against male performance. From a CDA perspective, this is a moment where the hegemonic order of discourse is explicitly questioned, with the user advocating a parallel rather than subordinated discursive space for female competition.

Another critical comment questions the choice of music as representation:

“I am part way through and enjoying getting to know the girls more, however, I really hate the music choices Netflix have gone with! It's the ‘selling sunset’ vibe soundtrack and I personally think having a song that literally sings ‘yeah I'm a girl boss’ in the background kinda undermines how incredible these women are. They’re not reality stars under a gimmick. They are elite athletes. Love everything F1 academy is but please tell Netflix not to go so cheap with the production next time!! The girlies deserve better than wannabe influencer backing tracks!” (app. 10c).

This comment focuses on the soundtrack, arguing that its pop-culture style does not match the drivers' elite sporting status. The commenter thinks the music undermines their authenticity. Using Fairclough's terms, this is about how the series looks and sounds: the commenter wants the style to highlight, not weaken, the athletes' legitimacy. Across these interactions, the voice allocation shifts dynamically: the official post frames the narrative through curated media praise; supportive audience members echo and amplify the sense of cultural achievement; critical voices challenge implicit comparisons with men's racing or interrogate aesthetic decisions; and mixed-stance commenters both affirm and seek deeper engagement with the structures behind the series. The interplay of these voices exemplifies CDA's contention that meaning is socially produced and contested through interaction between institutional and public discourse.

Within the framework of social practice, the post and its responses reveal the complex, ongoing labour of normalising women's authority in motorsport. The institutional deployment of intertextual media validation aims to establish legitimacy as a settled fact; however, audience discourse reveals that legitimacy remains subject to public negotiation, not only in competitive terms, but also in how representation is aesthetically and ideologically managed. This interactional field reflects the central argument of the thesis: that inclusion in elite motorsport is not a static achievement but an actively constructed and continually disputed position within the sport's order of discourse, sustained only through repeated acts of representation, endorsement, critique, and reinterpretation in both official and audience-led media spaces.

The post foregrounds legitimacy by featuring external press quotes, such as "More grit than glitz in female motorsport's answer to Drive to Survive" and "F1 is not a man's world anymore," (app. 10a) as bold overlays on a branded collage. This intertextual approach borrows credibility from established journalistic voices, positioning F1 Academy's Netflix

series as not merely self-promoted but critically acclaimed and worthy of cultural prestige. The use of “The reviews are in F1 Academy is the series to watch” (app. 10) is a textual construction that invites followers to accept the series’ cultural value as consensus rather than mere assertion. In Fairclough’s terms, this is discursive re-embedding: the post anchors its institutional self-presentation in the authority of independent media genres to reinforce its legitimacy.

The design mirrors the typical prestige-promotional grammar of major Formula 1 announcements, featuring a collage layout, logo prominence, and visual integration of institutional brands, so that women’s motorsport becomes visually routine, rather than exceptional. The repetition of such formats across F1 Academy communications signals normalisation: female-led racing is offered as the default, not the anomaly, integrating inclusion into the order of discourse. The prominent Netflix and Hello Sunshine logos also present women’s stories as part of the mainstream entertainment landscape, not only as a diversity project.

Representation in this post is constructed through curated headlines “Susie Wolff: F1 is not a man’s world anymore” (app. 10) and the selection of imagery centring female athletes, embedding women as the standard reference for sporting success. Audience comments like “Showed my daughter, she’s so inspired!” (app. 10) demonstrate the real-life impact of this visual and narrative strategy, positioning the featured women as role models and default athletes, rather than exceptions or novelties.

Agency is both visually and rhetorically underscored. The post lets the athletes and series speak through chosen reviews, presenting them as competitive “grit” and change agents within motorsport culture. Athletes are not described passively, but as the forces driving a new era. In the comment section, users such as mtysl “Loved it but would have liked more detail... like where do they go next and can they go to f2 etc... [...]” (app. 10) echo

and expand this agency, pressing for greater recognition and practical pathways, not just surface representation.

The post constructs its meaning by strategically incorporating and recontextualising voices from sports journalism, women's media, and entertainment. By assembling these as evidence of consensus acclaim, it actively produces a social reality in which women-centred motorsport is discussed and validated in the language of mainstream achievement, rather than being perceived as niche or marginal. The discursive field broadens further in the comments, where supporters, critics, and engaged fans all participate in co-constructing legitimacy, raising new questions such as further competitive integration, merchandising, and narrative control.

The selection and remix of press reviews, authoritative branding, and the use of familiar launch grammar intentionally expand the discourse order in motorsport. This reframes what (and who) can be seen as central, authoritative, and worthy of cultural capital in the racing world. By presenting acclaim as an obvious fact rather than something contested, the post pushes for a new consensus about who belongs in motorsport at the level of digital and cultural discourse.



Appendix 11 (Motosportcom, May 1st, 2025)

The Motorsport Instagram post, “Everything you think about F1 Academy is wrong,” (app. 11) attracts an active debate over the legitimacy, purpose, and place of the F1 Academy in motorsport’s hierarchy. The process of discursive construction is evident in how commenters interrogate the series’ framing as an “academy” and its positioning alongside F1 events. For instance, @tre4tlr states: “Then why is it called ‘F1 Academy’, only held on an F1 weekend and sponsored by the F1 teams?” (app. 11a). This question challenges the representational strategy that aligns the series with Formula 1 prestige, calling into question the authenticity of its structural position. Further, @tre4tlr suggests: “How about the teams ‘loan’ previous years’ F1 cars... and give these top female drivers a real chance to show us, on the world stage, how good they are in an F1 car” (app. 11a). This proposal foregrounds agency and calls for a recalibration of what constitutes meaningful representation and competitive

legitimacy. The claim that these drivers are “put on a pedestal and labelled to be at, or on trajectory to be, the top of their sport” (app. 11a) critiques the practice of celebratory normalisation and implies a disconnect between symbolic elevation and the actual structures that facilitate progression.

The analogy from user @tre4tlr, “It’s like having a ‘400m Hurdle Academy’ and having the hurdles set at 40cm high and run over 150m,” (app. 11b) invokes modality to express scepticism about the seriousness and challenge presented by the series, casting doubt on its role in developing elite talent. Counter-responses perform their own discursive work. @correa_hungary replies, “cause it’s an F4 series, aimed for girls who are at the beginning of their single-seater careers... As with every F4 series and above, the ultimate goal is to reach F1; that’s why it’s called that” (app. 11b). Here, the comment attempts to situate F1 Academy within motorsport’s accepted order of discourse: as a foundational step on the established development ladder, rather than as a finishing point or direct feeder to F1 itself.

The negotiation continues as contributors provide biographical and career context to female drivers such as Lia Block and Alba Larsen. Descriptions of past achievements in rallying and single-seater racing challenge the assumption that these athletes lack relevant experience: “Larsen began her racing career in karting... transitioned to single-seater racing after winning a shootout in the FIA Girls On Track Rising Stars programme... debuted in the Indian F4 Championship... scoring points and a podium as the best rookie... Seems quite a bit of single-seat experience here” (app. 11d). This counter-narrative uses intertextuality, referencing other championships and developmental pathways to legitimise the status of current F1 Academy competitors.

Disagreement persists, with @tre4tlr arguing that the series functions as a “starting point, cheap, yet takes place at one of the highest profile super-elite sporting events in the world,” (app. 11f) and suggesting that if F1 Academy serves as a stepping stone, its

placement at F1 weekends (and association with high prestige) creates a mismatch with its developmental nature. The call for moving races to F4 events, along with the repeated citation of F4's global recognition as a feeder category, illustrates an underlying ideological negotiation about where legitimacy in motorsport is constructed and performed. Other replies, including those from @mwmsportmedia, insist that the point is visibility: "But it's meant to be an F1 organised event to give them a chance to show their skills in front of an F1 global audience. F4 championships are all national only" (app. 11g) and "It's a learning championship run by F1. It's not meant to be F1. It's meant to be a first step into single-seaters, not the last step before F12 (app. 11e). These interventions foreground the series' symbolic function as an accessible entry point, positioning its value within the social practice of widening the pipeline and offering greater exposure.

Across this comment thread, the representation of female drivers, the naming and framing of the series, and the definition of what constitutes real motorsport achievement are actively disputed. The interaction reflects the broader discursive tensions at play between those demanding more rigorous integration with F1 structures and those defending F1 Academy's developmental rationale. The discourse surfaces key issues in legitimacy, normalisation, and visibility, making clear that institutional narration alone does not settle questions of agency or belonging. Instead, legitimacy remains a socially contingent and continually negotiated product of digital and cultural interaction.

The patterns observed in this Instagram comment thread are significant because they reveal the live, public negotiation of legitimacy that lies at the heart of the thesis. They show that F1 Academy's official framing does not operate in a vacuum: its meaning, authority, and cultural value are co-produced with, and often contested by, audiences in real-time digital spaces. This underscores one of the central theoretical arguments of Critical Discourse Analysis,

namely that discourse is not simply transmitted, but is formed and reshaped through interaction at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough 1992). Analysing these exchanges is important because they reveal the gap between institutional intention and public reception, and illustrate how female legitimacy in elite motorsport cannot be assumed to follow automatically from increased visibility. Instead, legitimacy emerges as an unstable construct that must be continuously reinforced, defended, and sometimes redefined in relation to motorsport's existing order of discourse. By capturing moments where audience voices both support and challenge the series' positioning, we see how gender representation in motorsport is bound up with larger ideological struggles over hierarchy, separation versus integration, and what constitutes "real" competition. These interactions are therefore a valuable empirical site for observing the reproduction and potential transformation of the sport's gendered norms. Textual Analysis reveals how commenters' vocabulary phrases, such as "on a pedestal", "first step," (app. 11a) or analogies to hurdles and event standards, signal scepticism or support, forming the first layer of discursive meaning. Discursive Practice shows how the meaning of the post is shaped by real-time public negotiation: audience debates about institutional representation, calls for policy reform, and the elevation of biographical counterevidence for drivers all demonstrate how legitimacy is publicly co-constructed, reinforced, or challenged. Social Practice demonstrates that the intensity and variety of the debate reveal that institutional framing does not operate in a vacuum; legitimacy and normalisation are social products constructed through repeated confrontation and renegotiation. Gender representation thus becomes a live site of ideological struggle over hierarchy, access, and what counts as "real" motorsport.

The post became a live forum for debating the legitimacy of the F1 Academy as a motorsport series. For example, one commenter, tre4tlr, openly challenged the series by asking, "Then

why is it called F1 Academy, only held on an F1 weekend and sponsored by the F1 teams?” (app. 11a). This line of questioning puts the series’ representational strategy under scrutiny, specifically the attempt to legitimise F1 Academy by associating it with the established prestige of Formula 1 events and brands. Others questioned whether this association truly confers legitimacy or just symbolically elevates the series without grounding it in equivalent sporting achievement.

Commenters both support and resist the normalisation of F1 Academy. Some critique the “pedestal” effect, with tre4tlr arguing that drivers are portrayed as being “at, or on trajectory to be, the top of their sport” (app. 11a) even though the series does not offer a test comparable to F1’s elite level. This critique is illustrated by the analogy: “a 400m Hurdle Academy...hurdles set at 40cm high and run over 150m,” (app. 11b) implying that normalisation is more symbolic than substantive. In contrast, counter-comments defend normalisation, framing F1 Academy as an “F4 series, a first step into single seaters, not the last step before F1” (app. 11e) and argue that its visibility is crucial for women’s progression in motorsport.

Representation is actively negotiated: some detractors argue that institutional messaging falsely equates participation in the F1 Academy with elite status, while others offer examples of drivers’ prior achievements (e.g., Alba Larsen’s transition from karting to single-seater racing and points finishes in the Indian F4). Such details are shared to demonstrate real experience and sporting merit, countering the idea that female participants lack relevant credentials. This highlights the ongoing tension between symbolic and substantive representation in how the series is publicly discussed and justified.

Agency appears in suggestions for structural changes such as “loan previous years F1 cars... and give these top female drivers a real chance to show us, on the world stage, how good they are in an F1 car” (app. 11a), here, audience members themselves intervene,

proposing institutional reforms that would offer women performers the same opportunities for agency and competitive proof as their male counterparts. Agency is also evident in how athletes' career achievements are highlighted by some commentators to challenge assumptions about passivity or unpreparedness.

The thread itself is a vivid site of discursive construction: meaning around F1 Academy's status, value, and purpose is not set by official posts alone, but emerges through public questioning, rebuttal, and defence. Each contribution, whether challenging the "academy" framing or defending it, participates in shaping what the F1 Academy stands for within the broader motorsport public sphere.

The post reveals a contested order of discourse. Those supporting F1 Academy's current positioning argue that it fits within motorsport's hierarchy as a foundational, development-level series with global visibility, serving as a vital pipeline for women. Detractors argue that its placement at elite events misrepresents its level and creates a mismatch in the hierarchy.

5.1.0 F1 Academy's Instagram Narrative versus Motorsport.com's Audience Discourse

F1 Academy's Instagram uses celebratory, legitimising discourse and high-modality language like "History made!" or "Back on the top step 🏆." Women drivers appear as accomplished, professional, and proud. Posts normalise female participation, presenting it as routine and prestigious in the motorsport world. Empowering imagery, polished production, and frequent Formula 1 references embed athletes in the sport's order of discourse. Drivers are portrayed as pioneers, role models, and main actors in collective progress. The series presents itself as a developmental pathway and a symbol of institutional growth, portraying representation in a positive light.

By contrast, Motorsport's Instagram comments reveal scepticism, negotiation, and contestation. Legitimacy is openly questioned. Users challenge the need for a separate series, asking whether visibility brings opportunity and scrutinising the rigor of F1 Academy. Some debate whether the series advances women or reinforces gender separation. Critical discourse appears in comments such as: "aren't we just separating women from real F1 instead of giving them a fair shot with the guys?" and "if F1 Academy serves as a stepping stone, why position it next to F1 weekends at all?" (app.5.1.11). These exchanges invoke Fairclough's concepts of discursive construction, modality, and ideological negotiation. There is a clear demand for transparency about career paths. Users challenge representational authenticity and cite the detailed histories of drivers. Intertextuality is used to challenge assumed experiences or preconceptions.

This juxtaposition reveals a tension in the broader thesis: F1 Academy's posts use top-down normalisation and celebration, framing legitimacy, agency, and representation as settled outcomes of institutional action and increased visibility, while the Motorsport.com audience exposes the instability of these ideas. For the audience, legitimacy for women in motorsport is negotiated, debated, and sometimes resisted, always shaped by broader discursive and social practices. Thus, official communication and public response demonstrate that representation and authority are not merely what is presented, but are continually constructed, contested, and reframed through audience reception and dialogue. Therefore, this comparative analysis demonstrates that progress and inclusion in motorsport are not solely determined by official posts. The social practice of legitimacy depends as much on public negotiation and dissent as on institutional celebration. The interaction between these two discourses, one affirming, one contesting, is central to transforming gender norms. This dynamic is key in the ongoing struggle for recognition and belonging in elite motorsport.

5.2 *F1: The Academy*, Netflix series

Premiering in May 2025, Netflix's *F1: The Academy* takes viewers inside the all-female F1 Academy racing championship, offering unprecedented access to a docuseries. Created to address the gender gap in elite motorsport, the show follows the inaugural season of this pioneering development category. Across seven episodes, viewers meet fifteen ambitious young women as they face pressures, rivalries, and opportunities on and off the circuit. Produced by Hello Sunshine, the series is both a sporting chronicle and a cultural document. It profiles not just the adrenaline and skill on track but also the broader social dynamics. Central figures, including managing director Susie Wolff and rising stars Abbi Pulling and Lia Block, offer personal insights into the stakes: pursuing racing glory, navigating identity, and paving the way for future generations.

The show does more than narrate a championship. It foregrounds the institutional and emotional realities of motorsport's gender divide. Through intimate interviews, behind-the-scenes footage, and honest confrontation with stereotypes, *F1: The Academy* positions its protagonists as agents of change and excellence. The series exposes not just triumphs, but also the emotional labour, scrutiny, and double standards faced by those at the frontline of motorsport's transformation.

By doing so, *F1: The Academy* defines its analysis. It invests equally in documenting high-performance racing and analysing the cultural and structural factors that shape women's status in elite sport. This dual focus underpins examination of feminist media theory, framing, and critical discourse in contemporary mediated sports.

5.2.1 *No Friends on Track*, F1: The Academy, Episode 1

The debut episode, *No Friends on Track* situates F1 Academy's mission in motorsport's male-dominated history. It focuses on gendered participation and institutional barriers. Managing Director Susie Wolff addresses the exclusion of women, stating, "For too long, women have been told they don't belong in motorsport" (*No Friends on Track* 00:01:20). These editorial choices not only boost visibility but also begin normalising female competitors at motorsport's symbolic core. When athletes share their ambitions and presence, their agency is foregrounded, presenting them as active participants in rewriting motorsport's gender narrative.

The episode highlights journeys such as Lia Block's transition to international competition and Bianca Bustamante's navigation of dual roles as influencer and athlete. These are not just individual stories; they exemplify the broader representational demands of the context. The narrative stays anchored in themes of visibility and belonging, and this dual focus reveals the series' complex representational work. It portrays the athletes not only as competitors, but also as figures challenging historic boundaries of inclusion. Bustamante's comment, "All eyes are on us, not just to win, but to prove women deserve to be here" (*No Friends on Track* 00:06:40), shows how discourse operates in this context. Participation is both a professional pursuit and a symbolic challenge to the social structure of motorsport. At the level of textual analysis, the series foregrounds language and narrative structures to emphasise female participation as historically burdened and socially significant (Fairclough 2003).

Editorial and production decisions highlight the dual pressures these athletes face. The show reveals the emotional and psychological labour needed to handle high-profile scrutiny and institutional change. It emphasises editing, interview selection, and the blend of racing footage with reflective commentary. This illustrates Fairclough's 'discursive practice'

(Fairclough 2003), showing how media conventions generate interpretations. These decisions position both athletes and audiences within ongoing debates about legitimacy and inclusion. Moments highlighting imposter syndrome and self-image negotiation demonstrate how discourse shapes complex subjectivities. The series moves beyond reductive “stoic hero” narratives common in male-centred Formula 1 storytelling. These discursive choices reveal motorsport's wider sociocultural context, particularly gendered boundaries and institutional hierarchies, aligning with Fairclough's concept of ‘social practice’ (Fairclough 2003). Thus, the series not only documents competition but also helps renegotiate the meaning of legitimacy, authority, and inclusion in elite racing. Such scenes highlight not only competitive performance but also the need for discursive work, self-reflection, image management, and community building as athletes reconfigure the boundaries of legitimacy.

Through its textual and visual construction, the episode highlights how language, imagery, and sequencing contribute to shaping meaning. Athletes' achievements are framed within a transition of discourse order. Each accomplishment carries broader ideological significance. Competition is shown not as routine, but as an ongoing negotiation of authority and acceptance in the sport's culture. The narrative shifts athletes from solitary performers to active participants in institutional change, reinforcing the complex nature of belonging and recognition in a changing motorsport landscape.

Throughout the episode, the storytelling highlights contrasts. Track action is juxtaposed with candid paddock conversations about media scrutiny, “people will say we're here for the story, not talent” (No Friends on Track, 00:20:03), and open discussions of performance, opportunity, and belonging. Adversity is both external (historic exclusion, bias, doubters) and internal (pressure to perform for oneself and as representatives of broader female participation). While mainstream Formula 1 coverage treats competition as routine,

the women's series is presented as transformative, redefining the cultural and institutional significance of racing.

Production choices further emphasise themes of community and interdependence beyond the racetrack, marking a notable departure from the individualistic orientation typically found in male-dominated coverage. Female drivers are portrayed as encouraging and supporting one another, even as they compete, resulting in a dual narrative of rivalry and collective progression. This multidimensional representation appears repeatedly throughout the episode. Sometimes the paddock serves as a site of competition; at other times, it functions as a support network. The series itself serves as a catalyst for ongoing cultural and institutional change. Lia Block observes, "We're all friends, sure, but only one of us can make history" (No Friends on Track 00:14:15). Her words encapsulate the complex negotiation of solidarity and ambition within a context where legitimacy and recognition are still being collectively constructed.

Critical discourse analysis is most relevant when drivers negotiate perceived legitimacy. For example, Abbi Pulling confronts expectations: "People act like we're fragile or just here for the story, but we're here to win" (No Friends on Track 00:20:30). Such scenes highlight the gap between media expectations and athletes' self-perception, showing how language reinforces or challenges gender stereotypes. These moments culminate near the episode's end. In a group meeting, a coach reminds the team of their responsibilities: "You'll have to be better than the best not just fast, but role models too" (00:25:45). The episode's closing montage, set to the narration, "This is more than racing. It's proving we belong, lap after lap," (00:25:50) frames on-track action as part of a broader challenge to motorsport's history of who is allowed to compete and for what stakes.

No Friends on Track highlights both the possibilities and limits of contemporary gender representation in motorsport media. These women pioneer as competitors and agents of social

change, and the episode ensures viewers remember this. Their journeys are celebrated but marked by heightened scrutiny, emotional labour, and a need for self-justification. Unlike the unmarked authority of male drivers in F1, F2, and F3 media, where success and participation are expected, here every achievement signals progress, and every mistake tests legitimacy. The episode balances aspiration with precarity, and agency with burden, crafting a nuanced narrative that explores the complexities of these themes.

5.2.2 *The One to Beat, F1: The Academy, Episode 2*

In Episode 2, *The One to Beat*, the Netflix series extends its portrayal of F1 Academy as a space of visibility, pressure, and symbolic transformation. Framed around the Barcelona round of the 2024 season, the episode concentrates on two intersecting yet divergent narratives: Abbi Pulling defending her pole advantage and Amna Al Qubaisi confronting the aftermath of a crash. In both cases, the framing of performance and resilience is deeply gendered, offering fertile ground for the application of feminist media theory and discourse analysis.

The episode follows Pulling as she tries to turn her qualifying dominance into a race win. Her role as favourite is not neutral; Pulling is expected not just to win, but to show her top position is a precedent, not an exception. These narrative patterns fit within motorsport's broader gender order (Fairclough 2006). Legitimacy, resilience, and symbolic transformation shape Pulling's story, as well as the broader meanings associated with women's success or struggle. Though Pulling has pole position, she displays agency in moments of decision and performance. Yet these moments are always situated within larger institutional and societal expectations (van Leeuwen 1995). Early in the episode, Pulling appears on the grid, helmet on, as radio chatter and commentary set the tone: "All eyes on Abbi now she's the one to beat this weekend" (*The One to Beat* 00:03:45). At the level of textual analysis (Fairclough 2003), repeated phrases and framing devices, Pulling's presence is constructed as both central and

contested (Fairclough 2003). The editing alternates between scenes of quiet focus, Pulling in the race car, garage, or debrief, and depictions of external pressures. At times, team staff and commentators depict her performance as central to the Academy's legitimacy. This interplay evokes Fairclough's notion of discursive practice (Fairclough 110). Media routines and editorial choices guide viewers, amplifying the pressures and broader significance of Pulling's race. Pulling's driving represents not only a quest for points but also carries symbolic weight. She is cast not only as "the fastest driver," but as "the one to beat," a phrase echoed in narration and behind-the-scenes commentary (The One to Beat 00:10:11; 00:12:28). The distinction between being described as "the fastest driver" and as "the one to beat" (00:10:11; 00:12:28) is significant both linguistically and contextually. It directly relates to the analysis of gendered representation in motorsport. The phrase "the fastest driver" (00:10:11) serves as an evaluative descriptor. It emphasises measurable performance, speed, results, and individual achievement. In contrast, narration and backstage commentary refer to her as "the one to beat" (00:12:28). This marks a shift toward collective recognition of her status. She becomes the benchmark, the competitor who defines the hierarchy and sets the standard for others to follow. This distinction not only grants her greater agency but also positions her at the centre of competitive narratives. It confers symbolic authority typically reserved for dominant figures in male sporting discourse. She moves beyond the trope of the "female exception." She is reframed within the universal sporting narrative. This shift demonstrates a recalibration in gendered media routines. It aligns with critical discourse and feminist media analysis by showing how narrative strategies can redefine representation. She is not merely included or tolerated; she is valued. She is cast as the main protagonist and the focal point of ambition and rivalry among her peers. When both formal narration and informal expert commentary echo such language, it fosters consensus around her legitimacy. It challenges entrenched hierarchies of gendered exclusion. This addresses historical patterns

in which women were often depicted through adversity or difference rather than as central figures. However, even this elevation is subject to negotiation. While "the fastest driver" (00:12:28) may be interpreted as a temporary or contingent accolade, the status of "the one to beat" (00:10:11) situates her firmly within the cultural and institutional centre. This distinction is crucial for understanding shifting norms in motorsport media. It resists reductive, stereotype-driven logics that have historically characterised female representation. It also underscores the importance of strategic narrative recalibration. This demonstrates the capacity of discursive practice to redefine the boundaries of merit, ambition, and legitimacy across gendered lines. In this way, the discourse constructs a dual reading: Pulling is both a skilled driver and a representative whose role stretches beyond sport. This dual narrative highlights the burden of representation faced by successful female athletes in male-dominated arenas. Media and commentary construct Pulling's identity as both athlete and symbol (Fairclough 1992, Wodak & Meyer 2001). Beneath this narrative lies a broader question: can Pulling and the series dispel doubt and consolidate their legitimacy within motorsport's discourse?

Amna Al Qubaisi's crash and its emotional aftermath provide a counterpoint. The coverage does not sensationalise the practice crash. Instead, it explores the emotional labour of recovery and doubt. After the crash, Amna is filmed sitting alone by the barriers, head in hands; her team debates strategy and risk: "You're not just racing for yourself anymore, you know," a mechanic quietly tells her (The One to Beat 00:16:50). Close-ups and long, quiet frames stress the isolating aftermath. Unlike the adrenaline celebrations typical in men's series (seen in many F1 podium posts), this portrayal centres vulnerability, introspection, and the cost of failure in a sport with few second chances.

Male setbacks in Formula 1 often use impersonal language about machinery, timing, or strategy, referring to a race lost to engine issues or failed pit stops, such as it just wasn't

their day, the engine failed, or a technical issue ended the driver's race early. These accounts typically leave emotions unspoken. In contrast, *The One to Beat* shows Amna Al Qubaisi's crash with direct emotion, centring her voice, "It's hard because you feel you let everyone down, not just yourself" (00:19:34). Rather than relying on the detached, technical abstraction typical of men's coverage, this narrative highlights human vulnerability and collective expectation, framing the incident as significant for both Amna and the story of women in racing broadly

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this moment highlights the complex pressures faced by female athletes in elite motorsport. The narrative does not allow the event to be a simple racing error. Instead, it unfolds in layers: she must crash, recover, reflect, and inspire. The initial crash causes disruption: recovery shows persistence and professional skill; reflection is presented as emotional and public processing; inspiration recasts the setback as a symbolic act. This sequence highlights the extra discursive labour required of women. Their mistakes become opportunities for wider affirmation and symbolic meaning. The coverage reveals how language, imagery, and editorial choices position female drivers within ongoing debates over legitimacy and belonging in motorsport's established order of discourse. By contrasting these two arcs, the episode builds distinct but connected representations. Pulling's story fits a high-performance aesthetic of helmets, telemetry, and track overlays. Amna's narrative unfolds more slowly and is more contemplative, with her visible uncertainty and emotional state foregrounded. Both get similar narrative weight. This illustrates F1 Academy's ongoing negotiation of its place in motorsport, functioning as both a developmental series and a site of discursive work toward institutional recognition. In both cases, the drivers perform not only in sporting terms but through what CDA recognises as narrative labour: producing results on track while also providing emotional and interpretive material that contributes to legitimising the series itself. The coverage constructs

their roles as extending beyond competition to include the communicative work of sustaining visibility, authority, and audience connection.

In this context, Pulling carries expectations of consistent success. Amna is shown through a more fragile, introspective lens, emphasising empathy and recovery. The series places its drivers at the centre of the story, not on the margins. But belonging is still produced through language, imagery, and sequencing. These choices demonstrate that inclusion necessitates ongoing negotiation, emotional openness, and careful management of legitimacy within the boundaries of elite motorsport.

The One to Beat goes beyond Episode 1's introductions. It explores the lived complexity of performance, aspiration, and doubt within an institution learning to tell women's racing stories. The episode represents a shift: drivers are not just present to be seen; now, they must prove their visibility can last under pressure. With this, the stakes of gender representation increase. This move from symbolic arrival to institutional testing is key to F1 Academy's legitimacy. Earlier portrayals, like the Miami rounds, focused on novelty. Drivers like Amna and Hamda Al Qubaisi were milestones: "Both are left with questions as they look to rediscover their form from last season" (*The One to Beat* 00:19:45) says the official series guide, casting their participation as an achievement. This shift encapsulates a critical development in the series' logic of representation. In earlier episodes and motorsport narratives, the presence of women was often framed as a symbolic breakthrough. Visibility alone was celebrated, and simple participation was regarded as both an achievement and a novelty. This framing commonly marked female competitors as exceptions and milestones. For example, in the Miami rounds, the participation of drivers like Amna and Hamda Al Qubaisi was described as reaching a new stage, rather than as enduring in competition. However, in *The One to Beat*, the series advances to a new narrative phase. Now, visibility is tested by sustained competitive performance under pressure. Female drivers are no longer

just there to fill a quota or make a point. Their legitimacy as individuals, and for the F1 Academy, depends on their ability to compete, excel, and handle the intense demands of elite racing. They are trailblazers and standard-setters who must repeatedly prove their capacity to endure and succeed at the highest level. This shift makes gender representation more complex and consequential. It is no longer enough for women to appear in the paddock; they must continuously justify their roles with resilience, skill, and repeated achievements. This narrative recalibration raises the stakes. Institutional and cultural legitimacy now depend on showing that visibility is not fleeting or tokenistic but robust and sustained. This requirement carries profound implications for how gender equality is defined, measured, and narrated within elite motorsport media.

In *The One to Beat*, the narrative transcends visibility and instead demands sustained performance, resilience, and consistency in a challenging environment. Abbi Pulling, frequently highlighted as the Alpine-supported championship favourite, is often discussed in both commentary and behind-the-scenes moments: “All eyes on Abbi now. She’s the one to beat this weekend” (*The One to Beat* 00:03:45). These repeated references present her as more than a participant. She emerges as a precedent-setter, someone whose continued success can normalise female competitiveness at the top. As the series notes, “Pulling has put a target on her back. Yet there’s nowhere she’d rather be, with her racing future at stake if she doesn’t deliver the title” (*The One to Beat*).

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, this narrative shift exposes the increasingly dynamic negotiation of authority, belonging, and legitimacy through textual and representational choices. The editing alternates between moments of intense preparation, a tight close-up of Pulling’s helmet as she waits on the grid, snippets of team radio strategising, and post-race technical debriefs and reflective scenes featuring drivers voicing self-doubt or

determination. Lia Block, for instance, recalls her own perseverance: “Last year was definitely a learning year... I keep pushing and keep working as you’re in the car, you are giving your best and you have no regrets even if you win, you’re learning” (00:17:12). These narrative strategies make visible the ongoing discursive labour required for women not just to arrive, but to thrive and remain central within the institutional logic of motorsport.

As drivers are positioned not just to appear, but to repeatedly deliver results under scrutiny, visibility becomes contingent on sustained achievement. Quotations like “With her racing future at stake if she doesn’t deliver the title” and Pulling’s acknowledgement that “taking the title isn’t just about winning but keeping her rivals as far behind as possible” (00:08:34) highlight that continued inclusion now depends on performance and resilience in high-stakes settings. In this context, the stakes of gender representation intensify. The show’s commentary clarifies that female drivers are there not only to be seen, but to quote Bianca Bustamante, “to prove women deserve to be here” (00:06:40). The burden has shifted: every race, mistake, or triumph is overlaid with social significance, amplifying the discursive tension between individual athletic achievement and institutional change. The transition from visibility as novelty to legitimacy under pressure is reinforced by editing choices that highlight moments of tension (Pulling awaiting her pole position), self-reflection, “It’s hard because you feel you let everyone down, not just yourself” (00:19:34), and resilience, “You’re not just racing for yourself anymore,” says a team member.

Voice allocations throughout the episode ensure drivers articulate their challenges and determination: interviews, commentary, and team exchanges present them as active agents in their own narrative. Interactions with teams and media underscore the collective expectations, “If she doesn’t deliver the title...” (00:23:43), making visible that legitimacy is contingent on repeatedly overcoming pressure and scrutiny.

5.2.3 *Target On My Back* from *F1: The Academy*

Episode 4, *Target On My Back*, marks a pivotal shift in the F1 Academy docuseries, as the narrative focus shifts from issues of belonging to the harsh realities of rivalry, scrutiny, and institutional pressure. The episode specifically centres on Abbi Pulling's role as championship leader, the "target" of the grid, while also examining the shifting dynamics for the Al Qubaisi sisters as they confront both form and heightened expectations. At this juncture, the analysis of gender representation in motorsport moves beyond entry and inclusion to consider how success reshapes the attention and scrutiny women receive within the sport's established discourse.

The episode opens with a commentator describing Pulling as "the one with a target on her back; everyone's watching Abbi now" (*Target On My Back* 00:01:22). This clear focus on the gaze and the phrase "everyone's watching" (00:01:22) enacts the theme of visibility. It shows how women's success in motorsport draws constant public scrutiny (Kian et al. 2011). The typical sports trope of the hunted frontrunner is reworked for a women's-only championship. Pulling's success does more than "prove" her presence; it also marks her as a benchmark others aspire to and are pressured to surpass. The difference between the episode's framing and the familiar trope of the "hunted frontrunner" lies in both the context of gendered scrutiny and the underlying discursive function of visibility. In classic sports narratives, the frontrunner trope highlights how the athlete in the lead must defend their position against challengers. Being "hunted" is a mark of dominance and conveys both accomplishment and risk. In this F1 Academy episode, however, Pulling is described by commentators as "the one with a target on her back; everyone's watching Abbi now" (00:01:22). This goes beyond routine competitive tension. The language constructs her success as subject to public gaze, not only within the sporting field but also as a site of wider social observation and expectation. The theme of "everyone's watching" enacts a discourse of

heightened visibility. Pulling's success in a women's-only motorsport draws constant public and institutional scrutiny. This reflects research that shows women who succeed in male-dominated arenas are made especially visible, and their legitimacy is always under evaluation (Kian et al., 2011). While the classic trope marks the leader as the measuring stick for other competitors, the F1 Academy version reworks it. Pulling's achievements do more than set the sporting standard. Her position continually "proves" not just her individual competence but also validates the legitimacy of women's presence in the sport. Her role as "the one to beat" is both athletic and representational. She is a benchmark that others aspire to and feel pressured to surpass. Yet her success also stands as a test case for women's place in motorsport as a whole. This additional layer makes her role more socially loaded than that of a hunted frontrunner in a non-gendered, established sporting context.

The expectation to continually validate her position underscores how discursive constructions of competitive legitimacy for female drivers are shaped (Fairclough 1992). This reflects the extra burden of representation for women, who must perform both as athletes and as symbols of gender equity. Interview segments with Pulling highlight this duality: she feels pride but also faces heightened scrutiny and anxiety, as evidenced by her words and body language, which show her navigating these pressures: "a single mistake and it'll all be 'told you so'" (00:07:13). Yet, she does so within a field of institutional and media influence that shapes her options (van Leeuwen 1995). This narrative shift moves women in motorsport from the edges of representation to the centre, while still embedding their stories in an ideological framework that assigns symbolic meaning to their presence.

The Al Qubaisi sisters, Amna and Hamda, provide the episode's emotional contrast. As their campaign falters, the show combines garage debriefs, self-critical interviews, and moments of isolation, tying to the theme of gendered scrutiny. "Whenever we slip, people talk like maybe we weren't meant to be at the front anyway," Amna quietly admits

(00:14:44). The discursive construction here avoids light-hearted 'rookie struggles,' instead portraying heightened expectations, informed by their family legacy and the recent history of women's series.

The editing and language of this episode contribute to the discursive construction of female excellence as a concept that is continuously subject to scrutiny and negotiation. Pulling's pole laps are accompanied by aggressive graphics and countdown timers, which textually and visually construct a narrative of achievement positioned within a climate of persistent challenge. Interview segments repeatedly return to the idea of pressure from "inside and outside the paddock" (00:18:02), further building on both Pulling's and the Al Qubaisi's experiences to foreground not only the competitive context but also the broader social expectations attached to female athletes. The episode's discourse is marked by recurrent phrases such as "answering critics" and "proving themselves, again and again" (Target on My Back) highlighting the cyclical nature by which women's successes are represented as always under evaluation, provisional, and open to contestation within motorsport's established order of discourse.

The episode highlights the complexity of peer rivalry and alliance in an all-female context. Teammates and rivals move between support and competition. "It's nothing personal, but I want to be the one to beat Abbi," a competitor says to the camera (00:21:38). The narrative frames competitiveness as normal. Still, it hints that, for women in F1 Academy, each rivalry also tests the category's legitimacy. Rivalry is depicted in the episode as an inherent and expected feature of sports culture. This is especially true in a highly competitive domain like motorsport. The narrative shows that for the female drivers, competition between teammates and rivals is treated as routine. Statements like "It's nothing personal, but I want to be the one to beat Abbi" (00:21:38) emphasise that the desire to surpass one another is normalised and central to sporting identity. While this dynamic reflects the universal nature

of rivalry in sports, the episode also subtly underscores another point. In the context of F1 Academy, each competitive relationship does more than test individual skill. It becomes a means of continually affirming the legitimacy and credibility of the women's category as a whole. By the end of the episode, team principals and commentators note that "the real story is how these women handle being the ones to chase and the ones being chased" (00:27:56). This underscores that women in motorsport must navigate both competition and ongoing representation, reflecting mainstream sporting discourse and the persistent need for visibility in the sport. A key example of this narrative is the episode commentary, which focuses on how women are expected to manage rivalry emotionally and psychologically. By highlighting their ability to withstand pressure, a quality stereotypically seen as lacking in women, the commentary sets an expectation for viewers to scrutinise women drivers' emotional resilience differently from male athletes'. While the quote does not claim women are inept at handling rivalry, it risks reinforcing the idea that their legitimacy as competitors depends on disproving stereotypes. Thus, the narrative indirectly supports the view that rivalry is especially challenging for women in elite sport.

5.2.4 *F1: Drive to survive versus F1 academy: the series*

The representation of Formula 1 in Netflix's *Drive to Survive* provides a powerful lens through which to examine legitimacy, authority, and belonging in elite motorsport. Across its seasons, viewers are immersed in a world with perpetual high stakes. The right to compete and the dominance of male participants are often implicit and rarely questioned. From the start, *Drive to Survive* frames drivers as automatic heroes. "I'm here to win. That's what matters," (S1:E1, 00:05:04) declares Daniel Ricciardo as he prepares for a new season. The legitimacy of Ricciardo and his peers is never questioned. The show's editing and directorial style emphasise their authority through the use of dramatic music, rapid cuts, and close-ups of determined faces, powerful cars, and tense team discussions. Lewis Hamilton reveals the

intensity of competition: “It’s not just about being fast. You have to fight for every inch, every point, every trophy” (S2:E2, 00:23:17). The discourse centres on performance, achievement, and rivalry.

Conflict and drama shape the narrative, with tension often heightened or artificially created. “I don’t care who I have to beat to win. No friends on track,” (S2:E5, 00:41:55) says Max Verstappen, embodying the individualistic, combative ethos. The competitive environment appears natural for men, and their right to belong is never commented on. Setbacks are explained as technical or personal: “We had a terrible result today, but that’s racing. You move on, you get better” (Kevin Magnussen, S1:E7, 00:19:22).

Vulnerable moments like Pierre Gasly’s demotion from Red Bull become tests of will. “It was tough, but you have to show you deserve to be here. You have to prove yourself every single time” (S2:E4, 00:36:12). Yet, the idea of having to prove oneself rests on the assumption that all present already possess legitimacy. The focus remains on personal redemption, rather than structural change.

Drive to Survive’s narrative omits discussion of exclusion, gender, or legitimacy negotiation. Stories of women in F1, such as brief appearances by team principals or engineers, are infrequent and peripheral. These appearances emphasise novelty or exception, rather than routine belonging. Central authority remains with the male protagonists. As Charles Leclerc affirms, “This is where every driver wants to be... Formula 1 is the ultimate goal” (S3:E1, 00:09:46). He speaks from a position inside tradition, not outside it. Comparing this order with the F1 Academy series shows a discursive gap. *Drive to Survive* naturalises male achievement through the lens of inherited myth and spectacle. In contrast, F1 Academy highlights the visible labour of legitimacy. F1 Academy athletes assert their right to compete: “All eyes are on us, not just to win, but to prove women deserve to be here.” (No Friends on Track 00:06:40). They narrate vulnerability, institutional challenge, and collective ambition

as central themes. F1's media representation is based on inherited belonging. F1 Academy is based on negotiation and advocacy, where every win partly rewrites the sport's narrative boundaries.

5.3 Media Coverage of F1 Academy

It is essential to clarify the purpose and broader implications of the following sections. These sections guide the reader through an in-depth investigation of gendered representation, legitimacy, and media discourse in F1 Academy and women's motorsport. This analysis uses both external media perspectives and close readings of the documentary and social media. It aims to move beyond surface-level accounts of visibility. Instead, it examines how various actors, including journalists, commentators, institutions, and the documentary itself, shape the boundaries of inclusion and define competitive legitimacy. Each sub-section adds a specific piece to this puzzle. Some show how certain tropes are challenged. Others reveal how institutional scripts are reinforced or how female athletes are depicted as professionals, rivals, or exceptions.

5.3.1 Motorsport review

The Motorsport review of Netflix's *F1: The Academy* written by Emily Selleck in 2025, titled *Netflix's 'F1: The Academy' has all the right ingredients, but doesn't quite stick the landing*, offers a critical yet appreciative perspective on the docuseries' portrayal of gender in motorsport. Selleck highlights strengths such as the "beautifully shot, emotionally resonant" (Selleck) storytelling and the importance of increased visibility for women racers. However, she also points out the series' major flaws, particularly narrative limitations that undermine its ambitions to empower female athletes (Selleck). This observation frames the rest of Selleck's

review, informing the analysis of how narrative choices shape perceptions of gender and legitimacy in the docuseries.

Early in the series, Susie Wolff declares, “This isn’t a moment. It’s a movement.” (Selleck), Selleck uses this claim to illustrate the disconnect between the series’ empowering rhetoric and its execution. The review’s central critique concerns the way the show constructs its stories: F1: The Academy appears to be invested in presenting the journeys of drivers Bianca Bustamante, Doriane Pin, and Abbi Pulling, but the narrative primarily uses them as figures to market motorsport to new audiences, rather than exploring their authentic experiences. The review offers nuanced praise, citing moments such as “Pulling’s quietly touching relationship with her father, and the Al Qubaisi sisters facing injury, on-track struggles, and parental pressure” as “compelling, intimate moments” (Selleck). However, it notes the show seems “oddly determined to put [Bustamante] in a box,” (Selleck) especially regarding her social media persona.

The article also raises questions about the lack of information regarding the academy’s position and the stakes for participants, key issues for legitimising it in motorsport. Selleck notes, “From the title alone, one might assume the series is a direct path to Formula 1, especially for casual viewers” (Selleck). They add, “We’re told there are obstacles for women in motorsport, but the problems are never clearly explained” (Selleck). This lack of clarity leaves the stakes “nebulous”:

“When Wolff says, ‘If you can’t cut it in F1 Academy, there won’t be much of a motorsport career left for you,’ it falls flat. Not because it’s untrue, but because the series hasn’t explained what ‘cutting it’ means. Where does F1 Academy fit in the F1 ladder? How do these drivers compare to their male counterparts? What are the next steps after the Academy?” (Selleck).

In discussing Bustamante's journey, the review uses her to examine ideologies and assumptions about agency and value. Bustamante is "one of the most magnetic personalities in the series," yet the narrative largely "revolves around her social media presence, positioning it as a distraction at best, and a liability at worst" (Selleck). The reviewer notes the "unspoken irony" in Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff's statement, "This is not an influencer racing series. Only the best must survive," (Selleck) yet every driver, male or female, understands the need for marketability and financial backing in modern motorsport. Several men have recently joined F1 mainly due to the sponsorships they attract. The criticism directed at Bustamante seems excessive, as she's using the only path available to women without extreme wealth who still need to fund their careers" (Selleck). The review ultimately praises the authenticity in moments like "a scene celebrating Block's birthday in Singapore," described as "one of the most authentic, joyful moments of the season" (Selleck). It adds that the show does well in spotlighting women in motorsport, and this visibility "is a powerful win" (Selleck) that will inspire future generations. But, if this is truly a movement as Wolff insists, the series must trust that audiences can handle the full, complex truth of women's path to the top (Selleck).

The review identifies the series' use of high-profile slogans, such as Susie Wolff's repeated phrase, "This isn't a moment, it's a movement" (Selleck) as attempts to create legitimacy. However, Selleck argues that these statements are undermined by the series' failure to explain what it takes to succeed in F1 Academy. This gap weakens the show's authority and leaves Wolff's statements without substance for viewers who lack a background in motorsport.

Representation is complex. The review notes Pulling and Pin are "framed as the hard-nosed, serious talents... Watching Pulling train and perform is genuinely thrilling, and Pin's growth over the season is a testament to what time, funding, and opportunity can do for

women in sport” (Selleck). Yet, Bianca Bustamante becomes a site of representational anxiety, as “her storyline revolves around her social media presence, positioning it as a distraction at best, and a liability at worst.” (Selleck). Toto Wolff’s line, “This is not an influencer racing series. Only the best must survive,” (Selleck) ties legitimacy to marketability, itself gendered, since “the criticism hurled at Bustamante feels outsized given she’s simply playing the game the only game available to women who don’t hail from extreme wealth but still need to fund their careers” (Selleck). The tension is not just about inclusion, but about who is allowed to “count” as a legit sports figure.

The series tries to normalise through visuals and emotion, “beautifully shot, emotionally resonant... scenes celebrating Block’s birthday in Singapore... a reminder that while these women are both fierce competitors and complex people” (Selleck). Yet, the review finds a structural gap: “the show rarely explains itself. From the title, one might think the series directly leads to Formula 1... but we’re constantly told there are obstacles... [that] are never clearly explained... Without that, the stakes feel nebulous” (Selleck). Normalisation is visual, not fully built into the institution.

Agency is present but ambivalent. Pulling is depicted as a serious talent with “genuinely thrilling” performances, and Block’s narrative leverages her father’s legacy to frame her resilience. On the other hand, agency is constrained for Bustamante: “The on-track editing does her no favours either. She was far from the only driver who made mistakes... but hers are put under a microscope” (Selleck). The show fails to recognise that her “social media earnings played a significant role in securing a drive, even though that context is critical... for driver development in today’s landscape” (Selleck). This agency is at once celebrated and restricted by institutional and editorial gatekeeping.

From a Faircloughian perspective, the review demonstrates how the docuseries and their media reception collaboratively construct discourses of gender, legitimacy, and merit.

Narrative choices such as making Pulling's training central, making Bustamante's media activity contentious, or refusing to clarify the career structure are not neutral. They set the agenda for what the audience can imagine as possible or legitimate for women in motorsport, making these elements central to the social practice of gender representation in the sport .

5.3.2 Discussion under F1 academy post

The Instagram comment thread beneath the F1 Academy Netflix post offers a telling snapshot of audience discourse that both questions and complicates the series' official story. The leading comment by @hocuspocuspaf, "Popular opinion: Not a single person out of F1 Academy will ever win a real F1 race," (app. 12a) is a strongly worded statement that sets the thread's tone. It appears direct, but from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, it shapes a narrow definition of success, that only F1 wins prove legitimacy. This framing overlooks other achievements, such as improving visibility, normalising women's participation, or opening motorsport pathways. In this way, legitimacy is defined narrowly, minimising the program's wider social value. The ensuing replies demonstrate the contested nature of this claim and illustrate how representation, agency, and ideology are negotiated in public discourse. One user, by the name of @verakooy, responds, "yeah bc they don't get the same opportunities so no duh," (app. 12a) directly linking performance outcomes to structural inequality rather than individual inadequacy. By reframing agency, the commenter highlights that women drivers are denied opportunities due to institutional and cultural barriers. Another reply by @a._mmc._ to pushes in the opposite direction: "they've made a literal Netflix series about this championship, which only women are allowed to enter," (app. 12a) suggesting that visibility itself constitutes opportunity. Here, legitimacy is discursively tied to symbolic representation rather than structural integration, reflecting the competing ideological assumptions underpinning the debate.

As the thread develops, the conversation shifts toward broader questions of fairness and access. One user, by the name of @keanu_b66 notes, “it's literally a whole academy to get women in the sport. Why isn't there something like that for everyone who just doesn't have enough money for it?” (app. 12c). This statement broadens the terrain of inequality from gender to class, exposing the social practice of motorsport's financial exclusivity and redirecting critique towards the economic barriers that prevent many young drivers, male or female, from progressing. The reply from user @aimercaracc, “cause this program is focused on removing gender-based prejudices and not the financial inequalities,” (app. 12c) delineates the program's institutional rationale, foregrounding its limited but deliberate ideological framing. This exchange exemplifies the CDA principle that discourse both reproduces and challenges social structures, as users negotiate what the Academy's remit should be.

Other responses e.g. by user @tomere_shapira26 explicitly identify sexism as the central barrier: “the fact that people are sexist? people don't think women can get to F1 and give them less opportunities” (app. 12c). Here, the problem is discursively located not in women's sporting agency, but in the deep-seated ideologies of exclusion and disbelief within motorsport culture. Yet, competing counter-discourses emerge that re-naturalise gender disparities using numbers and probability. One user, by the name of @forest_4a_ argues, “1% of motorsport licenses are given to females...9990 men, 10 women, what are the odds any of those 10 women will be among the best to make a top div series? Not good. So, the whole point is to showcase women drivers. Young girls will see this and want to get involved.” (app. 12b). This probabilistic logic serves as both a reductive assumption/presupposition, positing that scarcity reflects innate outcomes rather than systemic exclusion, and an argument for the value of visibility. The user reframes the purpose

of F1 Academy as a long-term project of normalisation, designed to inspire the next generation rather than deliver immediate winners.

The thread also reveals how some discourses continue to deploy essentialist notions of physical difference to delegitimise the Academy's existence. User @only_leo writes, "the fact that 'F1' Academy exists implies that the only way women could enter F1 is if the cars were slower and thus less physically demanding." (app. 12d). This statement mobilises gendered ideological assumptions about capacity and draws on deeply entrenched stereotypes that undermine women's sporting legitimacy. Such statements reflect what Fairclough terms the order of discourse, where within motorsport culture competing narratives of meritocracy, exclusion, biological essentialism, and progressive reform coexist and jostle for dominance. Conversely, other interventions seek to re-legitimise women's participation by drawing on intertextuality, referencing initiatives like the Iron Dames program in GT3 as counterexamples where women have competed successfully within mixed-gender environments. This widens the discursive field and situates the Academy within broader debates about segregation versus integration in motorsport.

What is particularly striking across the thread is the style of exchange. Many comments employ strong modality, "none of them will ever make it," "never win a real race," "only way women could enter" (app. 12e-f), while others counter with equally firm assertions about inequality, sexism, role modelling, or probabilistic inevitability. Sarcasm, antagonism, and categorical declarations dominate the rhetorical style, highlighting how legitimacy itself is discursively unstable, always under contestation, never universally accepted.

5.3.3 BBC article

At the textual level, the BBC article *F1 Academy: All-female junior category to hold seven rounds at grand prix in 2024*, by Andrew Benson, uses positive and institutional language. It

repeatedly refers to F1 Academy as an “all-female junior category” (Benson) and emphasises its connection to major Formula 1 events. Phrases like “support races for grands prix” (Benson) and quotes from leaders, such as Susie Wolff’s statement, “We want to inspire young girls and women across the globe and show them that there’s a place for them in our sport,” (Benson) present the series as both developmental and inspirational. The article highlights key themes: visibility “racing alongside F1”, legitimacy “providing not only the opportunity for the drivers to develop their skills on F1 tracks”, and ambition “take the series to the next level” (Benson). This language frames F1 Academy as a progressive step, showing women’s participation as a needed and celebrated change in motorsport.

For discursive practice, the article relies on voices of authority by quoting Susie Wolff and F1 chairman Stefano Domenicali. It also reports the sport and series’ official goals. These choices demonstrate the close connection between the F1 Academy and the broader Formula 1 brand. The article repeats promotional messages and reinforces F1’s role as the gatekeeper for the growth of motorsport. It spreads the official perspective, echoing a common pattern in mainstream sports reporting: change is described from the top down, using chosen statements that prompt agreement and celebration. There are no critical voices, tough questions, or mention of ongoing barriers. This shows that normalising women’s participation is presented as both a goal and a growing reality, focusing on preferred views and reducing debate.

At the social practice level, this coverage adds to efforts to reshape how motorsport is discussed. The F1 Academy is presented as a response to past exclusion and a catalyst for cultural change. Repeated references to inspiration, like “inspire young girls... show them that there’s a place for them,” (Benson) help shift the focus from novelty to routine inclusion. Still, by labelling the series "support races" (Benson) and emphasising development, the text maintains a two-level system. Women’s racing is noticed but placed besides, not inside, the main hierarchy. This indicates that motorsport’s gender order is shifting, with inclusion being

supported in words and structure, but full integration is still in progress. Using Fairclough's framework, the BBC article drives and reflects the slow change in legitimacy and representation of motorsport. It celebrates F1 Academy's progress, boosts institutional authority, and pushes positive stories about gender inclusion. But it also repeats careful boundary-setting and cautious steps that have marked women's entry into elite racing (Benson).

5.3.4 Skysports' article

At the textual and linguistic levels, the article *F1 Academy 2025: Calendar, teams, drivers, format, points system for all-female racing series*, by Nigel Chiu in 2025 on Skysports, repeatedly invokes the gendered specificity of the series. It is described as an "all-female racing series," (Chiu) making inclusion notable rather than normalised. Phrases like "prepare and develop female drivers" (Chiu) and "provide the experience to progress to Formula 3, and help provide Formula 2 and Formula 1 opportunities in the future" (Chiu) show that participants require a special developmental track. This implicitly constructs difference and "otherness" in relation to the default (male) pathway. The piece relies on evaluative and aspirational language, quoting Susie Wolff's plan to "give more access to track time, racing and testing, as well as support with technical, physical, and mental preparations" (Chiu). This frames F1 Academy as both remedial and empowering. Referencing 1976's Lella Lombardi as "the last and only woman to score points in Formula 1" (Chiu) also highlights the historic gender gap and legitimises institutional intervention.

From the perspective of ideology and representation, the article presents F1 Academy's existence as evidence of both a problem and its solution. Female progression in motorsport is depicted as exceptional and in need of justification and guidance. Phrases like "designed to provide a pathway for women in motorsport" (Chiu) and "breaking barriers and inspiring more young women to consider a future in motorsport" (Chiu) construct female

participation as both aspirational and corrective. The repeated focus on “barriers” and “progress” (Chiu) reflects an ideology of incremental liberal reform. Yet, it always frames women as distinct from the assumed centre of the sport.

In terms of power dynamics and positioning, the article privileges authoritative, institutional voices. It gives prominence to Susie Wolff and Formula 1 leadership, while marginalising fan, athlete, or critical perspectives. The official narrative, “F1 Academy was launched...with the aim of preparing and developing female drivers to enable them to progress to higher levels of competition” (Chiu), reinforces the gatekeeping role of Formula 1’s existing structures. This subtly locates the power to bestow legitimacy outside the women themselves. The absence of counterclaims or critique also makes the current institution-led account of inclusion seem unproblematic and universally celebrated.

Intertextuality is evident through references to Lombardi and historical gender disparities. It is also seen in references to Formula 3, Formula 2, and Formula 1 as steps in a developmental “pathway.” The article’s narrative draws legitimacy from the history of male-dominated motorsport, always positioning F1 Academy as a feeder. It describes it as not yet an equal arena. The frequent use of pathway metaphors both invokes and reinforces motorsport’s hierarchical order. Social context is fundamental. The article appears in a major sports outlet at a time when both the FIA and Formula 1 are facing scrutiny for their inclusion efforts. This context shapes its optimistic, celebratory tone with phrases like “breaking barriers” and “taking the series to the next level” (Chiu). Yet, it portrays gender inclusion as an ongoing process, never fully completed, and subject to perpetual top-down oversight.

6 Perspective: Placing the Thesis in Broader Contexts

This thesis argues that F1 Academy enhances the legitimacy of women in elite motorsport through digital media. To understand this process, it is essential to examine multiple

academic perspectives, historical developments, and comparable initiatives, producing a richer and more nuanced interpretation of the findings.

Including Feminist Media Theory (Hooks 2000) would open a discussion about how media narratives reflect and reshape gendered power structures. In particular, it would focus on how patriarchy is reproduced or resisted in motorsport coverage and fan discourse. Through this lens, marginalisation, intersectional exclusion, and the ways 'empowerment' sometimes serves more as branding than systemic change come into focus. Building on these insights enables analysis of symbolic violence and highlights persistent norms around femininity, merit, and authority, issues that connect to larger trends in sport, media, and cultural studies.

Integrating Framing Theory (Entman, 1993; Chong et al., 2007) would enable the research to analyse how meaning is constructed through the selection, emphasis, and organisation of narratives. Both institutions and audiences use specific frames. F1 Academy and its critics employ frames like 'trailblazer,' 'token,' or 'role model' to guide interpretation and shape legitimacy. Frames such as 'opportunity,' 'separation,' or 'meritocracy' influence which understandings of inclusion become dominant. These perspectives enable us to compare motorsport's gender discourse with cases in media, politics, and sports. They highlight both universal challenges and unique aspects of motorsport.

A broader view encompasses the evolution of gender representation in other sports, such as football, cycling, and athletics. This approach traces patterns of success, setbacks, and ongoing negotiation. For example, the Women's Champions League (UEFA.com) expanded visibility and investment in women's football, while Tour de France Femmes (Frattini) reintroduced a major stage race for female cyclists after decades of absence. Comparing these to F1 Academy highlights how institutional reforms interact with media and audience reception: reforms may boost coverage and legitimacy, but can also generate unforeseen

consequences or controversies. These comparisons situate motorsport's history within wider patterns of gender, media, and social change across sports.

By linking the thesis to debates on diversity, performative activism, and digital communication, the analysis connects motorsport to broader questions of legitimacy, equity, and inclusion in media and society. Consequently, this encourages reflection on the power and limits of representation, while also inviting discussion of strategic empowerment narratives and the ongoing struggle for meaningful participation in fields that have traditionally excluded women.

Placing F1 Academy alongside gender equity efforts in other sports provides the necessary context. The Women's Champions League in football and the revival of the Tour de France Femmes in cycling show that institutional reform can boost visibility, professionalism, and investment for women athletes. While these advances are celebrated, debates over equal pay, media coverage, sponsorship, and the meaning of 'equality' persist in gendered sports cultures. These sports face tensions similar to motorsports. Does creating separate women's competitions foster genuine integration and legitimacy, or does it risk relegating women to a parallel sphere of existence? In cycling, the Tour de France Femmes is hailed as a milestone but criticised for unequal stages, coverage, and prize money. Such challenges echo criticism of F1 Academy. Expanding opportunities and visibility prompt ongoing questions about whether reforms deliver structural change or only symbolic progress.

By drawing these comparisons, the analysis demonstrates that motorsport's gender reforms form part of broader global patterns of change. Like football and cycling, motorsport faces continuous negotiation over segregation, integration, and media-constructed legitimacy, as well as debates about authority and recognition for women athletes. The core argument is that F1 Academy should be understood as a key example within an international movement for gender equity in sport, shaped by intersecting cultural, economic, and institutional

dynamics. This perspective directly reinforces the thesis and connects its findings to wider questions of gender, representation, and legitimacy in contemporary sport.

7 Conclusion

The representation of F1 Academy in contemporary media, when compared to established male-dominated series such as Formula 1 and Formula 3, reveals a landscape characterised by strategic differences and ongoing change. Across official platforms, news outlets, and digital forums, F1 Academy appears not as a routine presence but as a project marked by transition, novelty, and ambition. Its existence is framed as a response to historic exclusion and a step toward gender progress, though this framing is intertwined with continued practices of differentiation even as it is celebrated for breaking boundaries.

Media narratives about F1 Academy use a language of aspiration, transformation, and exceptionality that is both clear and frequent. Official communications and mainstream coverage employ phrases such as “all-female series,” “trailblazer,” “barrier breaker,” and “creating opportunities” to highlight the program’s developmental and symbolic significance. Institutional voices, from Susie Wolff to F1 executives, legitimise the series and explain the rationale for a gender-specific approach. For example, news outlets mention “providing pathways” and “inspiring the next generation,” reinforcing the idea that female participation is necessary and remarkable, requiring special structures and ongoing discussion.

This markedness stands in sharp contrast to coverage of Formula 1, Formula 2, and Formula 3. In these categories, performance, rivalry, and sporting drama are highlighted using language that is generally unmarked and gender-neutral. Unlike coverage of F1 Academy, media narratives about male athletes do not justify their presence. Here, participants' competence and right to compete are simply assumed, inherited through tradition. Typical terms such as “rookie,” “championship battle,” or “team effort” frame the action, subtly

normalising male participation as the unquestioned standard and making it invisible, while female presence in F1 Academy is made hyper-visible through marked language. Even audience interactions on official platforms reinforce this: male presence is seen as standard and unremarkable, whereas female inclusion is repeatedly discussed and evaluated. This contrast highlights the persistent linguistic asymmetry employed to render gender visible or invisible in motorsport narratives.

F1 Academy's discourse relies on developmental and emotional frames. Media describe athletes as "future stars," "role models," or "inspirations." Institutional materials emphasise "journeys" marked by empowerment, emotional effort, and overcoming obstacles. Documentaries and social media highlight moments of achievement, camaraderie, and milestones, while stressing the emotional and symbolic challenges. Repeated references to "firsts" and the need to frame inclusion as a turning point depart from the routine, performance-focused stories typical of male-dominated coverage.

Some recent institutional strategies purposefully aim at normalisation, as evidenced by the use of achievement-focused language "impressive rookie run" or granting narrative agency to athletes. Still, these are outweighed by ongoing explicit differentiation. Group labels "the girls," "all-female grid," "Academy-backed driver" and group celebrations persist, indicating that even as coverage appears more equal, underlying differences remain. This discursive environment both reflects and perpetuates some stereotypes while also providing opportunities to challenge them. Themes of adversity, novelty, and group identity echo old tropes of female athletic fragility and exceptionality. These themes, noted in research, can reinforce the idea that women must always justify their place through extra effort or institutional support. At the same time, efforts to showcase professionalism, skill, and competitive ambition, as well as growing athlete agency, help challenge these frames and align stories more closely with traditional merit-based sports coverage.

In digital spaces, these tensions persist and become more visible. Comment sections under official posts and media reviews become places for debate on legitimacy, representation, and merit. Here, comments range from scepticism “Not a single person out of F1 Academy will ever win a real F1 race” (app. 12a) to support for visibility and normalisation “Representation matters! Let's go F1 Academy!” (app. 9). These exchanges reveal the complex and shifting legitimacy of women in motorsport, which is built and contested through ongoing interactions between official narratives and public debate.

These patterns have double-edged effects on gender equity in motorsport. On one hand, F1 Academy's existence and media presence mark real institutional progress: more opportunities exist for women, and their visibility in elite racing has never been higher. Framing that focuses on performance and athlete agency helps disrupt the old links between masculinity and motorsport. The creation of dedicated pathways and normalisation of female achievement can inspire new generations and shift resources, priorities, and prestige within the sport.

Yet, true equity, measured by routine inclusion, assumed legitimacy, and normalised coverage, remains limited by ongoing demands for symbolic work from women. As long as narratives focus on difference, exceptionalism, and institutional justification, full inclusion is delayed. The feedback loop between institutional concerns over legitimacy and audience scepticism keeps women's position in motorsport transitional and under debate.

F1 Academy's media coverage highlights broader cultural dynamics surrounding gender inclusion. Progress is clear, but normalisation and true parity remain unfinished. Only when women's achievements are a natural part of motorsport's narrative, central and unremarkable, will equity be achieved in participation and belonging. For now, F1 Academy both advances change and highlights the progress still needed.

Bibliography

- 2023 Tour de France Femmes route | *Cyclingnews*. (n.d.). Retrieved 1 October 2025, from <https://www.cyclingnews.com/races/tour-de-france-femmes-2023/map/>
- Benson, A. (2023, October 17). F1 Academy: All-female junior category to hold seven rounds at grands prix in 2024. *BBC Sport*. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/formula1/67136927>
- Bruce, T. (2016). New Rules for New Times: Sportswomen and Media Representation in the Third Wave. *Sex Roles*, 74(7), 361–376. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0497-6>
- Campbell, D. (n.d.). *Still something of a boys' club? Representations of women motor racing drivers in British newspapers between 2010 and 2020*. Northumbria University Research Portal. Retrieved 12 June 2025, from <https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/still-something-of-a-boys-club-representations-of-women-motor-rac-3>
- Chiu, N. (n.d.). *F1 Academy 2025: Calendar, teams, drivers, format, points system for all-female racing series*. Sky Sports. Retrieved 1 September 2025, from <https://www.skysports.com/f1/news/12433/13328380/f1-academy-2025-calendar-teams-drivers-format-points-system-for-all-female-racing-series>
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10(1), 103–126. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054>
- Cuneen, J., Ridinger, L. L., & Ross, S. R. (n.d.). (PDF) Drivers to divas: Advertising images of women in motorsport. *ResearchGate*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-10-03-2009-B003>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (1st edn). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203697078>

- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (641173; Second edition). Routledge. <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=7c250006-f190-3a45-a972-30409acf7b8b>
- Formula 1: Drive to Survive*. Created by Box to Box Films, Netflix, 2019–present.
- F1: The Academy*. Produced by Hello Sunshine and Netflix, 2025–present.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (n.d.). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Routledge & CRC Press. Retrieved 1 September 2025, from <https://www.routledge.com/Hallidays-Introduction-to-Functional-Grammar/Halliday-Matthiessen/p/book/9781444146608>
- Hooks, bell. (2014). *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2nd edn). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743189>
- Howe, O. R. (2022). Hitting the barriers – Women in Formula 1 and W series racing. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 29(3), 454–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068221094204>
- Janks, H. (1997). *Critical discourse analysis as a research tool*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/20525>
- Jorgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. 1–230.
- Kian, M. (2007). *Framing Differences in Gender-Related Sport Coverage by Internet Sites and Newspapers* By Edward (Ted) M. Kian, Ph.D. University of Central Florida.
- Kress, G., & Leeuwen, T. van. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (3rd edn). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Kristeva, J. (with Moi, T.). (1986). *The Kristeva reader*. Basil Blackwell.
- Leeuwen, T. van. (1995). The Representation of Social Actors. In *Texts and Practices*. Routledge.
- Matthews, J. J. K., & Pike, E. C. J. (2016). 'What on Earth are They Doing in a Racing Car?': Towards an Understanding of Women in Motorsport. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 33(13), 1532–1550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2016.1168811>

McCarthy, P., & Smith, J. (2022). Gender bias personality perception in stereotypically gendered sport. *Sport & Exercise Psychology Review*, 17(2), 76–87.

<https://doi.org/10.53841/bpssepr.2022.17.2.76>

Michel, M. K. (n.d.). *Women In Formula 1—A Social Media Campaign Designed To Promote F1 Academy*.

Representation. (2025, July 20). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/representation/book277180>

Selleck, E. (2025, June 4). *Netflix's 'F1: The Academy' Review*. <https://www.motorsport.com/f1-academy/news/netflix-f1-the-academy-review/10729623/>

Six trailblazing women of F1 past and present. (n.d.). Retrieved 1 October 2025, from

<https://www.formula1.com/en/latest/article/international-womens-day-trailblazing-women-f1-past-and-present.6rY8yNSHyQ15dyvqgxZDE0>

UEFA.com. (2025, May 24). *UEFA Women's Champions League history | UEFA Women's Champions League 2024/25*. UEFA.Com.

<https://www.uefa.com/womenschampionsleague/news/0250-0c50f8c5a638-5677bdc4dec5-1000--uefa-women-s-champions-league-history/>

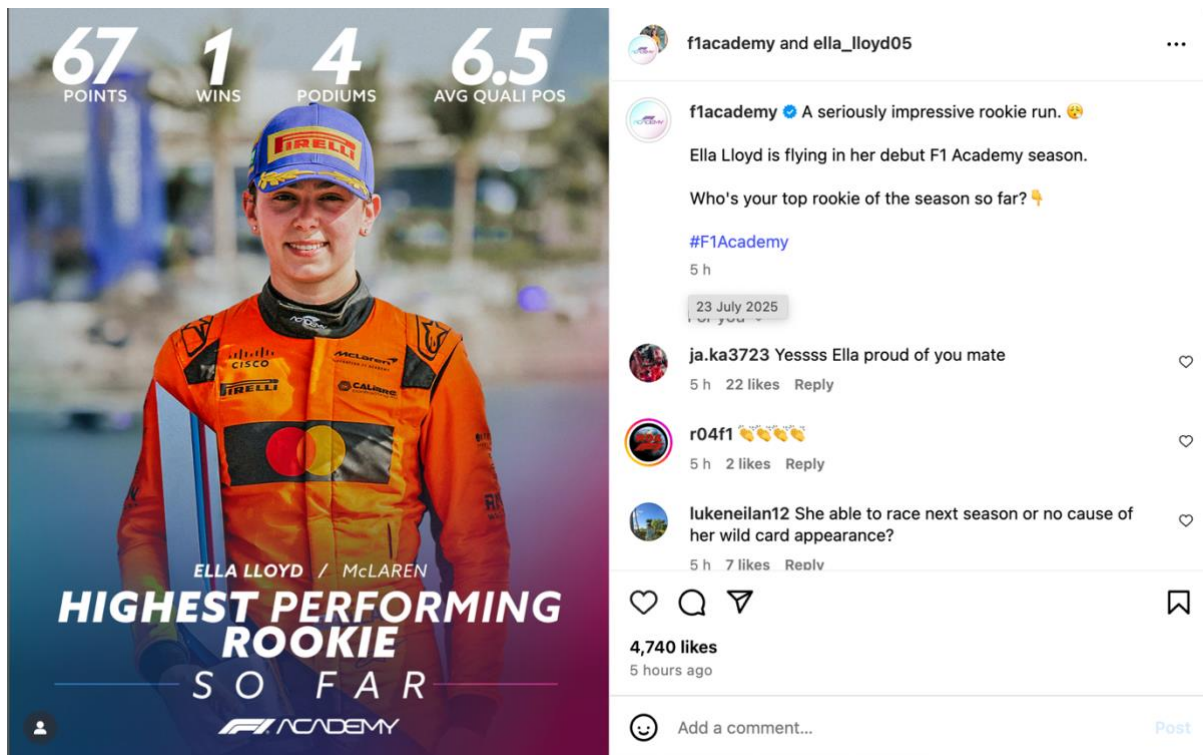
van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (with Wodak, R., & Meyer, M.). (2001). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis: Vol. v.v. 113* (1st edn, pp. viii–viii). SAGE Publications.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028020>

Appendix

Appendix 1 (F1Academy, July 23rd, 2025)



The image shows a social media post from the F1 Academy account. On the left is a promotional graphic for Ella Lloyd, a McLaren driver. The graphic features her in an orange racing suit with various sponsor logos (Pirelli, Cisco, McLaren, Calsonic, etc.). Above her, statistics are displayed: 67 POINTS, 1 WIN, 4 PODIUMS, and 6.5 AVG QUALI POS. Below her, it says 'ELLA LLOYD / McLAREN' and 'HIGHEST PERFORMING ROOKIE SO FAR' with the F1 Academy logo at the bottom.

The right side of the image shows the social media post interface. The post is from 'f1academy and ella_lloyd05'. The text of the post reads: 'f1academy A seriously impressive rookie run. 🏆 Ella Lloyd is flying in her debut F1 Academy season. Who's your top rookie of the season so far? 🏆 #F1Academy'. The post has 4,740 likes and was posted 5 hours ago. There are three comments visible: 'ja.ka3723 Yessss Ella proud of you mate', 'r04f1 🏆🏆🏆🏆', and 'lukeneilan12 She able to race next season or no cause of her wild card appearance?'. The interface includes icons for likes, comments, and shares, as well as a 'Post' button at the bottom right.

Stat	Value
POINTS	67
WINS	1
PODIUMS	4
AVG QUALI POS	6.5

ELLA LLOYD / McLAREN

HIGHEST PERFORMING ROOKIE SO FAR

F1 ACADEMY

f1academy and ella_lloyd05

f1academy A seriously impressive rookie run. 🏆 Ella Lloyd is flying in her debut F1 Academy season. Who's your top rookie of the season so far? 🏆 #F1Academy

5 h

23 July 2025

ja.ka3723 Yessss Ella proud of you mate

5 h 22 likes Reply

r04f1 🏆🏆🏆🏆

5 h 2 likes Reply

lukeneilan12 She able to race next season or no cause of her wild card appearance?

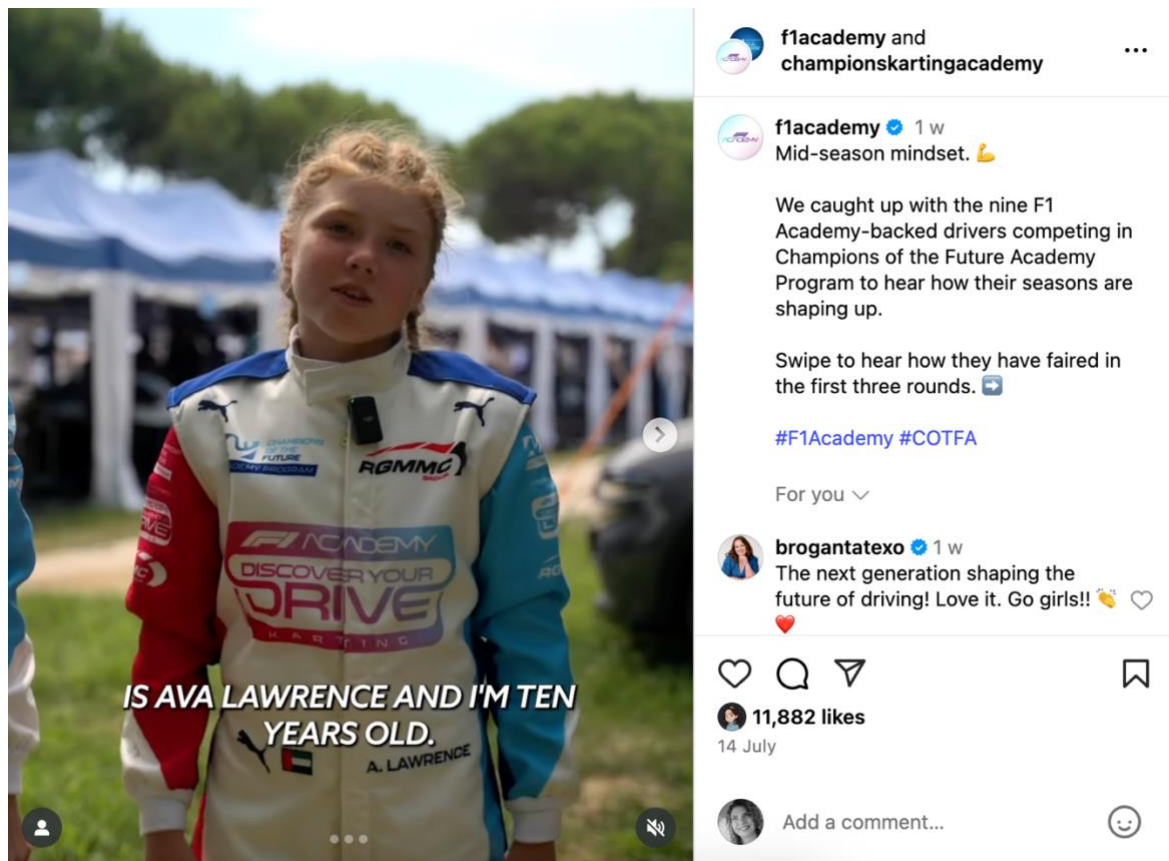
5 h 7 likes Reply

4,740 likes 5 hours ago

Add a comment...

Post

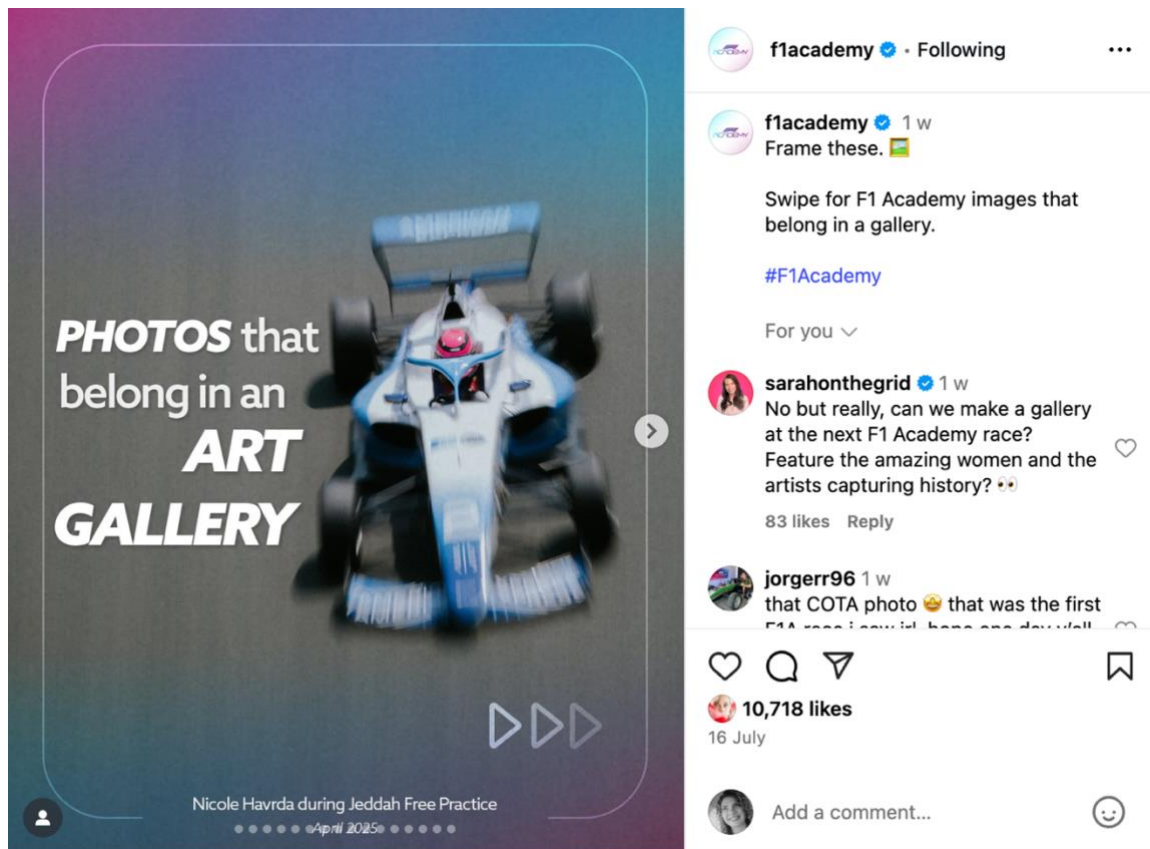
Appendix 2 (F1academy, July 14, 2025)



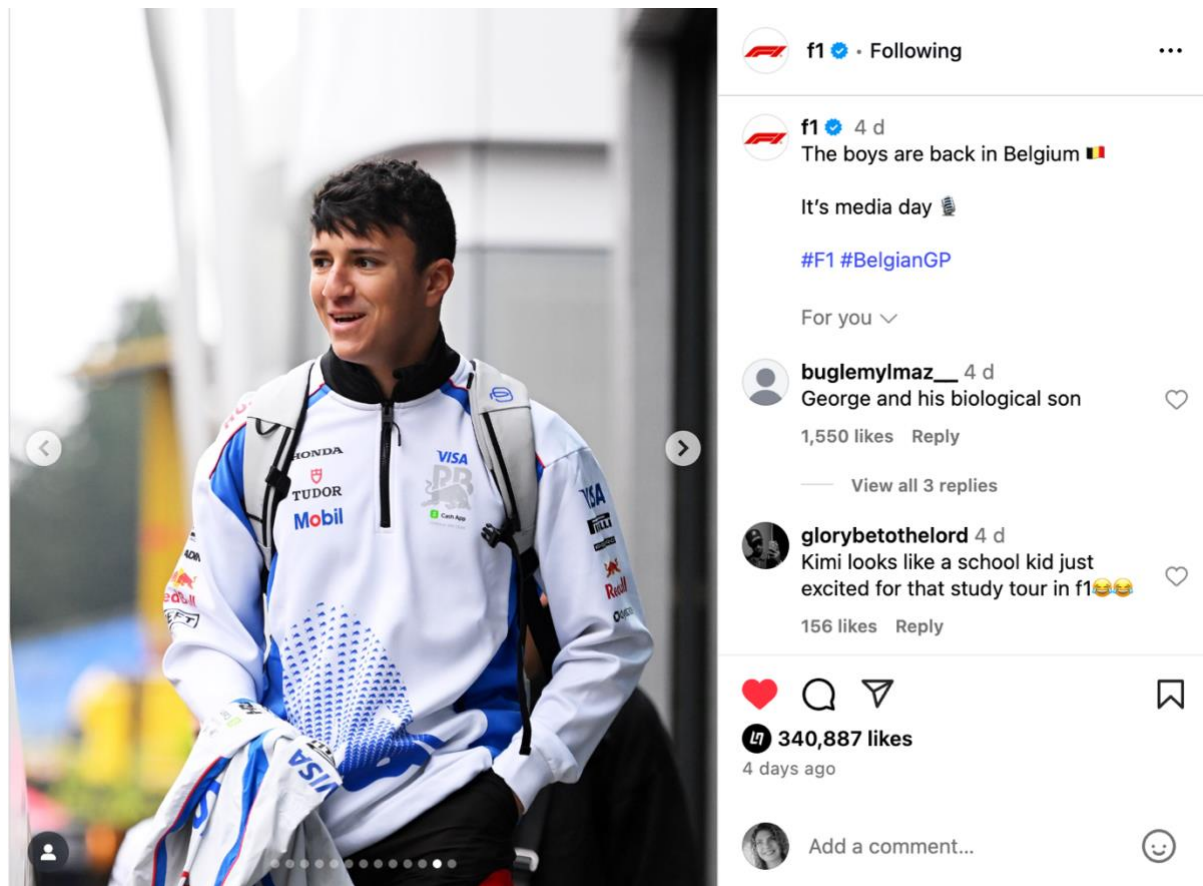
Appendix 3 (Joanneciconte, F1academy, July 24, 2025)



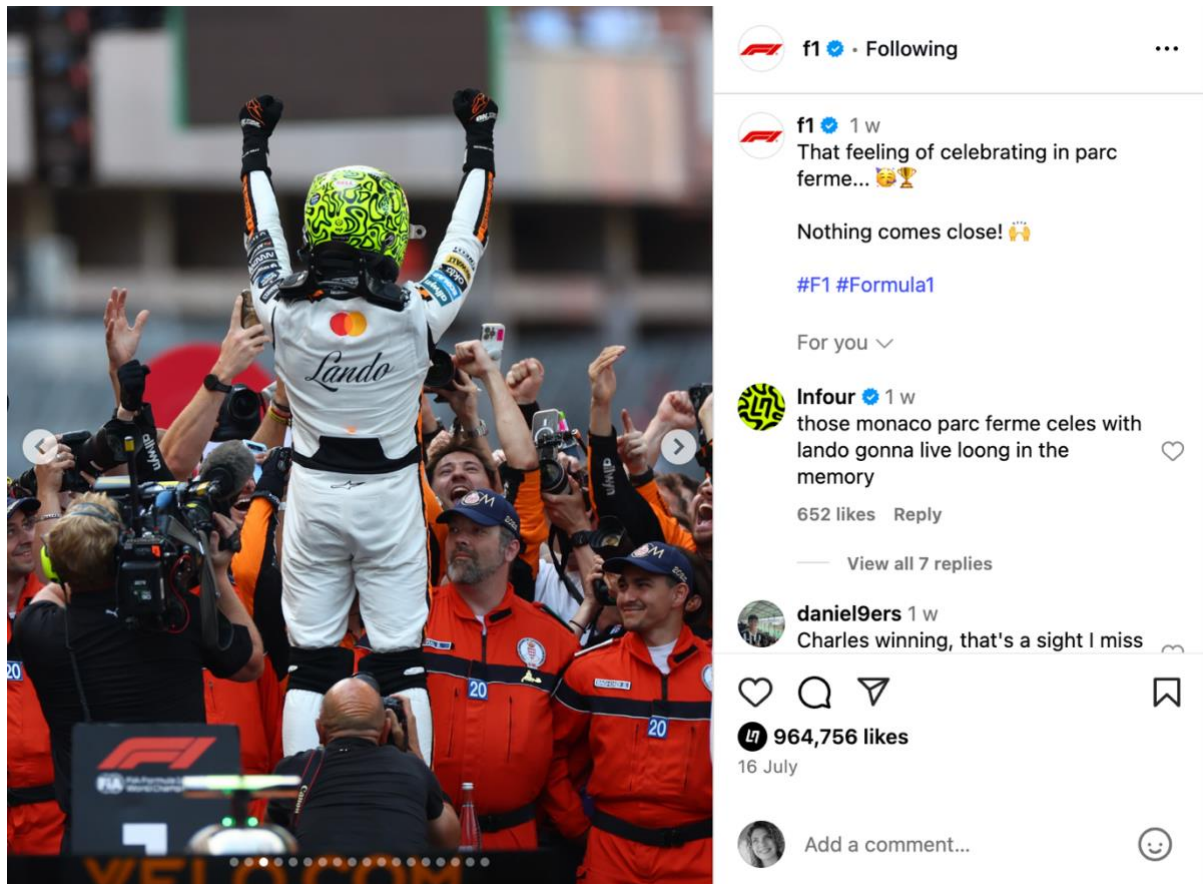
Appendix 4 (F1academy, July 24, 2025)



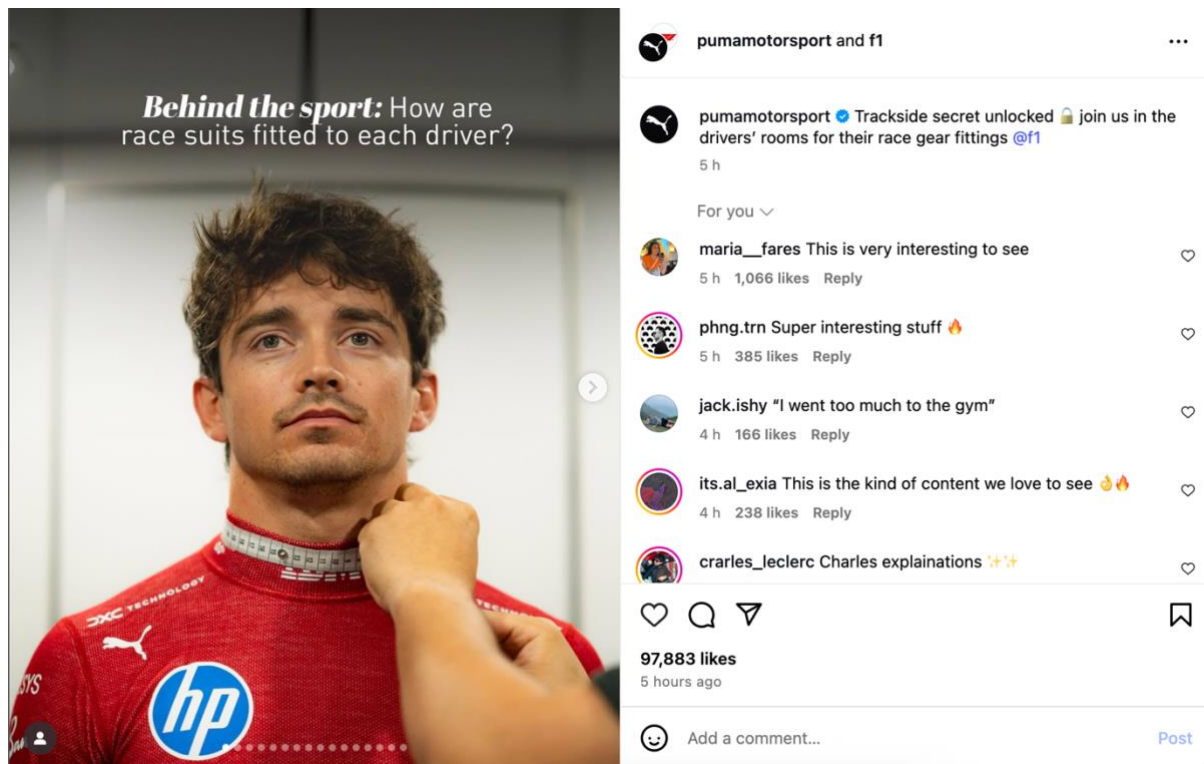
Appendix 5 (F1, July 24, 2025)



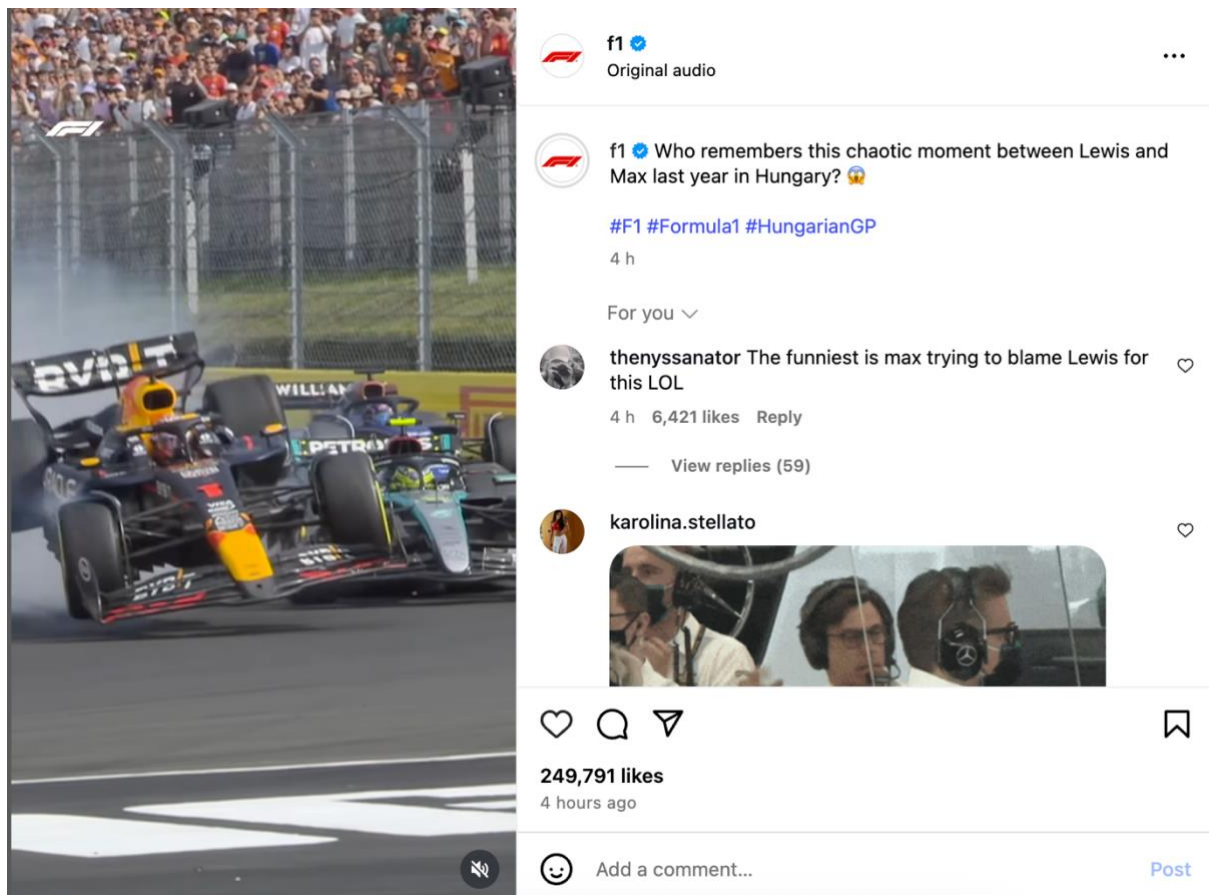
Appendix 6 (F1, July 16, 2025)



Appendix 7 (Pumasport, F1, July 29, 2025)



Appendix 8 (F1, July 29, 2025)



f1 Original audio

f1 Who remembers this chaotic moment between Lewis and Max last year in Hungary? 🤔

#F1 #Formula1 #HungarianGP

4 h

For you

thenyssanator The funniest is max trying to blame Lewis for this LOL

4 h 6,421 likes Reply

View replies (59)

karolina.stellato

249,791 likes

4 hours ago

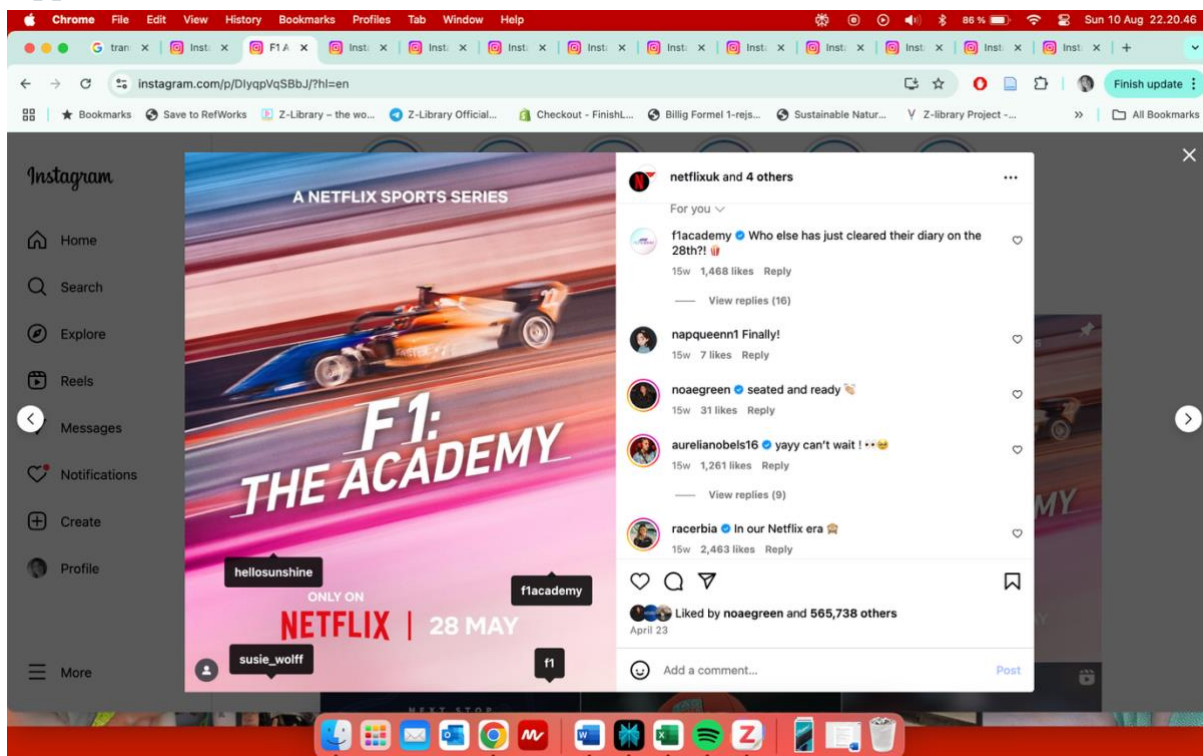
Add a comment...

Post

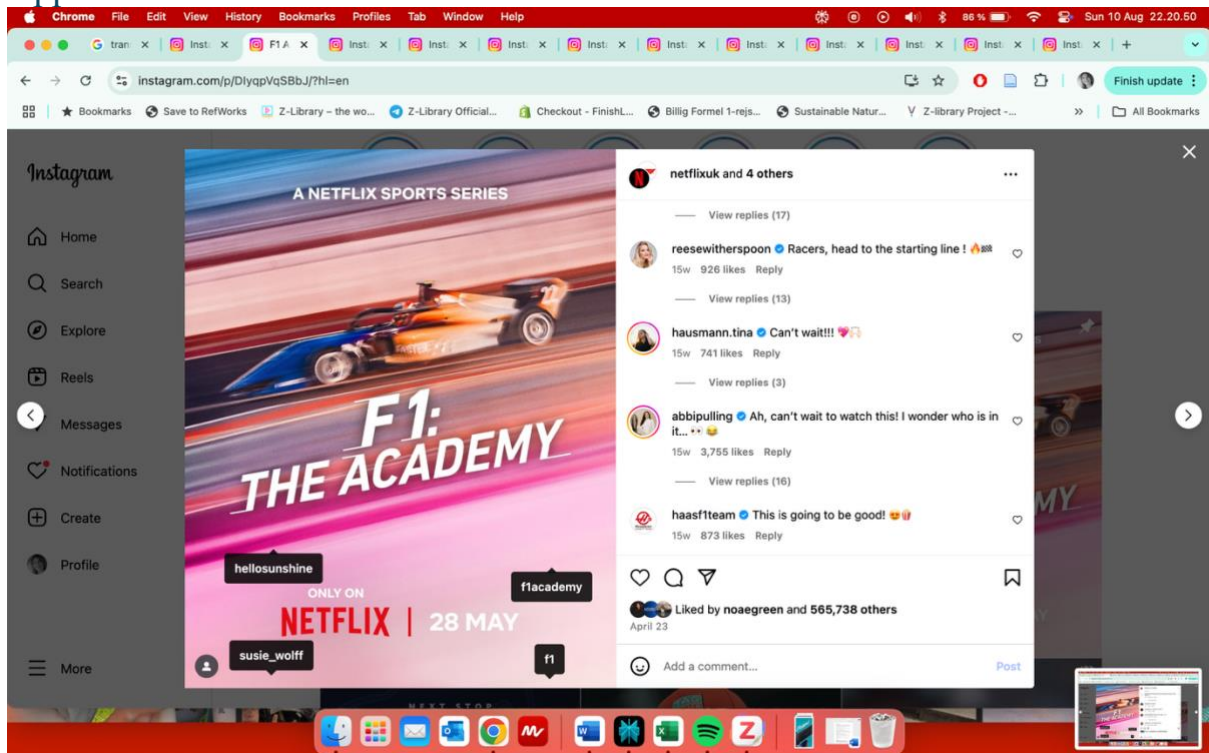
Appendix 9 (Netflixuk, F1academy, April 23rd, 2025)



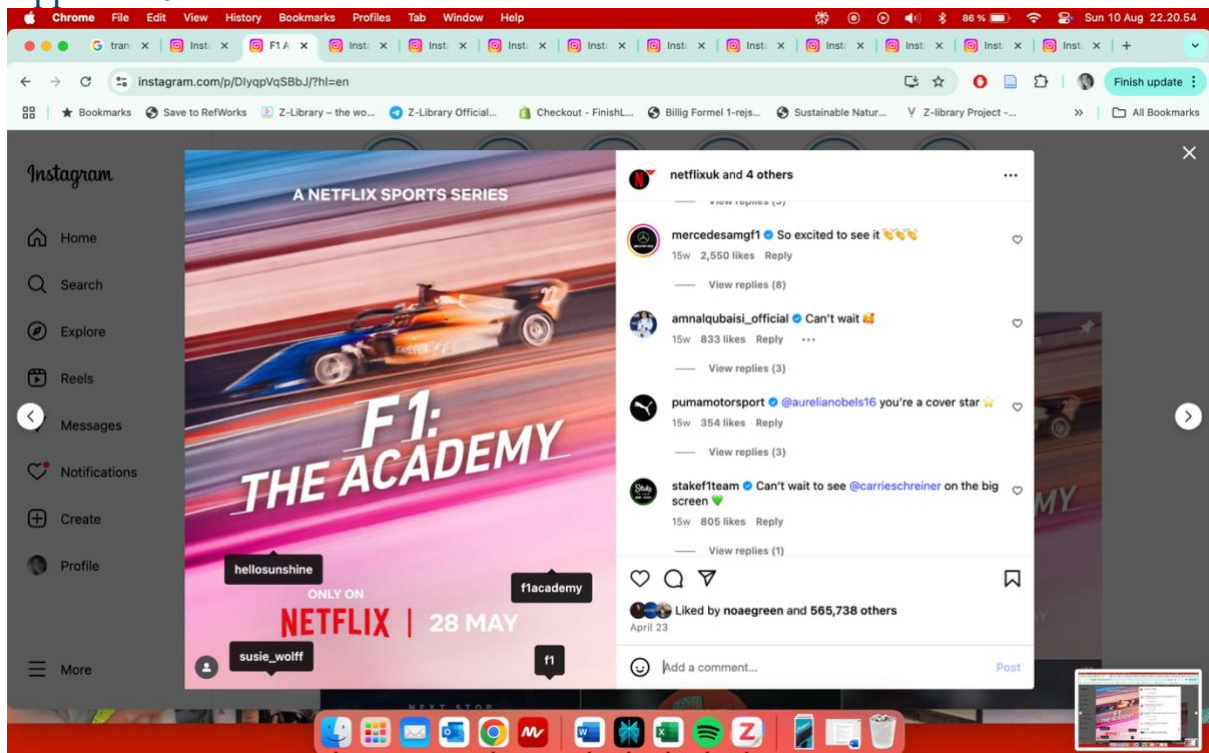
Appendix 9a



Appendix 9b



Appendix 9c



Appendix 10 (F1academy, July 7th, 2025)



Appendix 10a



Appendix 10b

**f1academy** • Following**70.inch.pianist** 9 w

The show is great, but the insistence on focusing SO MUCH on comparing to the men in F1 is wrong. Men and women are different, and that's ok. The focus should be on getting women interested in racing and helping them achieve their full potential.



2 likes Reply

[View all 19 replies](#)**iamjustmyra_** 9 w

If they can manage F1 G-forces and stress, I don't know why they couldn't be part of it. Of course I hope they don't put random Stroll-like girls in only to fulfill the audience.



Appendix 10c

**_heidijune_ 8 w**

I am part way through and enjoying getting to know the girls more however, I really hate the music choices Netflix have gone with! It's the "selling sunset" vibe soundtrack and I personally think having a song that literally sings "yeah I'm a girl boss" in the background kinda undermines how incredible these women are. They're not reality stars under a gimmick. They are elite athletes.



Love everything F1 academy is but please tell Netflix not to go so cheap with the production next time!! The girlies deserve better than wannabe influencer backing tracks!

10 likes Reply

Appendix 11 (Motosportcom, May 1st, 2025)



Appendix 11a

**tre4tlr** 15 w

Then why is it called 'F1 Academy', only held on an F1 weekend and sponsored by the F1 teams ?

I've no problem with the 'Academy' but how about the teams 'loan' previous years' F1 cars, restrict power output to all be the same, add power steering, reduce the driver controlled dynamic options and give these top female drivers a real chance to show us, on the world stage, how good they are in an F1 car.



These ladies are put on a pedestal and labelled to be at, or on trajectory to be, the top of their sport.

Appendix 11b

It's like having a '400m Hurdle Academy' and having the hurdles set at 40cm high and run over 150m 😊

6 likes Reply

— Hide all replies



correa_hungary 15 w

@tre4tlr cause it's an F4 series, aimed for girls who are in the beginning of their single-seater careers, like Larsen or Block. As with every F4 series and above, the ultimate goal is to reach F1, that's why it's called that.



1 like Reply ...

Appendix 11c

**tre4tlr** 15 w**@correa_hungary** Fully

understood, but your
argument doesn't stack up:
Lia Block...

"Before entering F1 Academy,
Lia had a successful career in
rallying, including competing
in the Baja 1000 and the
American Rally Association
Championship, where she
became the youngest ARA
champion."

Don't need too much further
training to go round a circuit
without a co driver! 🤔

Appendix 11d



Alba Larsen:



"Larsen began her racing career in karting, progressing through junior and senior categories with notable achievements. She transitioned to single-seater racing after winning a shootout in the FIA Girls On Track Rising Stars programme. In 2024, she made her debut in the Indian F4 Championship, scoring points and a podium as the best rookie."

Seems quite a bit of single seat experience here 👍

1 like Reply ...

Appendix 11e

**correa_hungary** 15 w

[@tre4tlr](#) Driving single-seaters after rallying requires different skills, and adaptation to a new car. To do it with a slower car like F1A is the best. For Larsen, Indian F4 consisted of just 5 race weekend, also she's 16 so F1A is a good starting point, as it's cheap

Reply

**mwmsportmedia** 15 w

[@tre4tlr](#) It's a learning championship run by F1. It's not meant to be F1. It's meant to be a first step into single seaters not the last step before F1

Appendix 11f

**mwmsportmedia** 15 w

Yes, some of them have done things before but it's meant to be at a level that someone can come straight from karts.



Reply

**tre4tlr** 15 w

[@correa_hungary](#) Starting point, cheap, yet takes place at one of the most high profile super-elite sporting events in the world... 🤔



Reply

Appendix 11g

**tre4tlr** 15 w

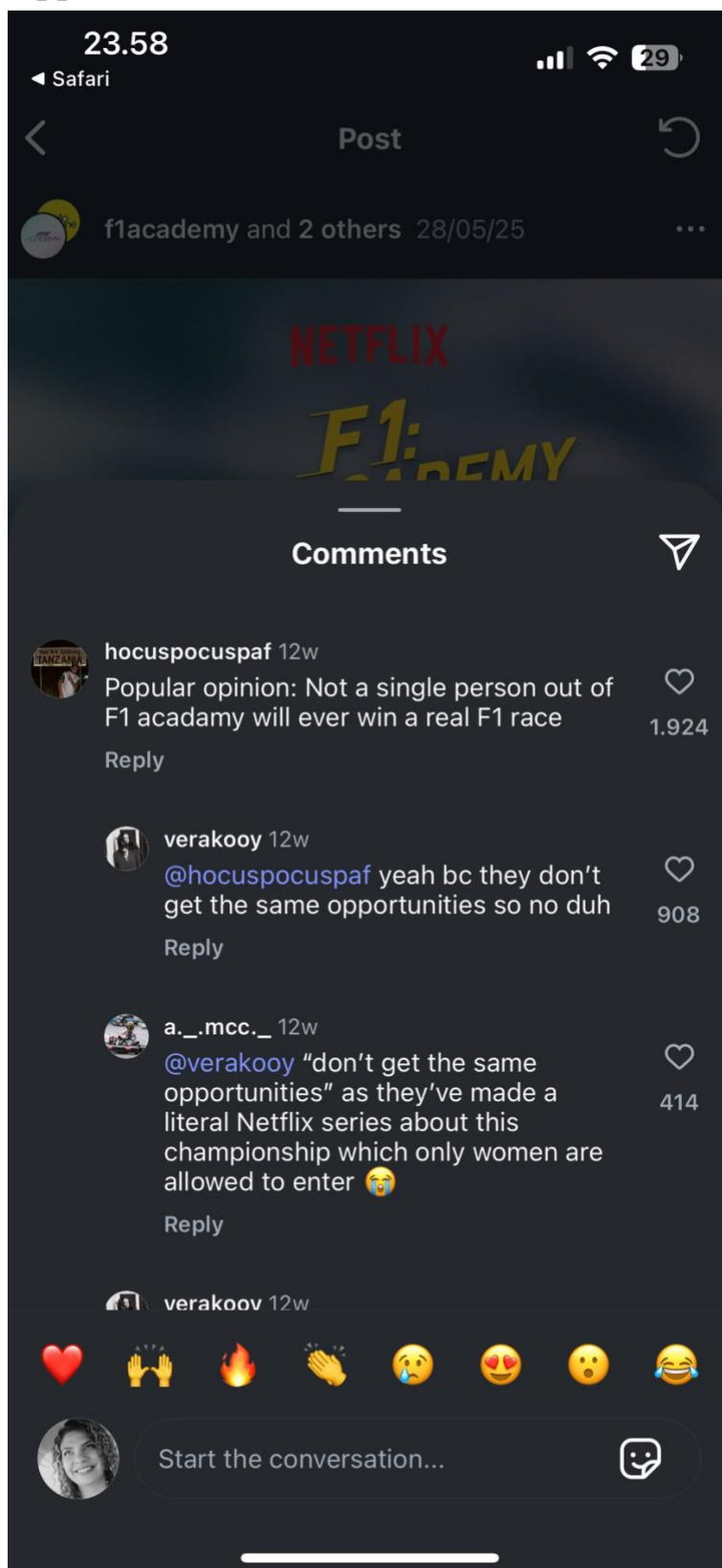
Then have the event held at F4 race days 👍 You know the one; "the class that is globally recognized as an entry level open wheel racing category for young drivers that serves as a stepping stone from karting to single-seater racing." 👍

Reply

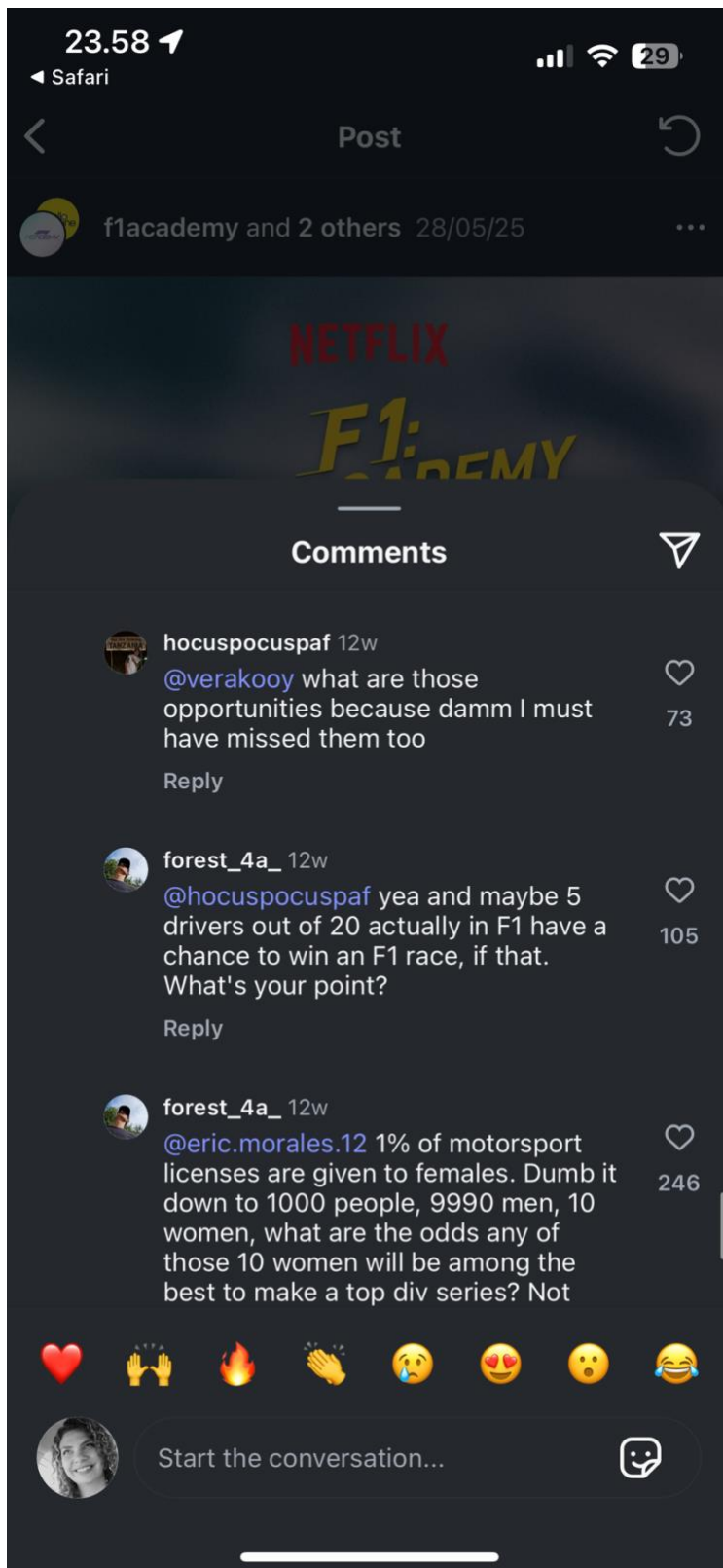
**mwmsportmedia** 15 w

@tre4tlr But it's meant to be an F1 organised event to give them a chance to show their skills in front of an F1 global audience. F4 championships are all national only.

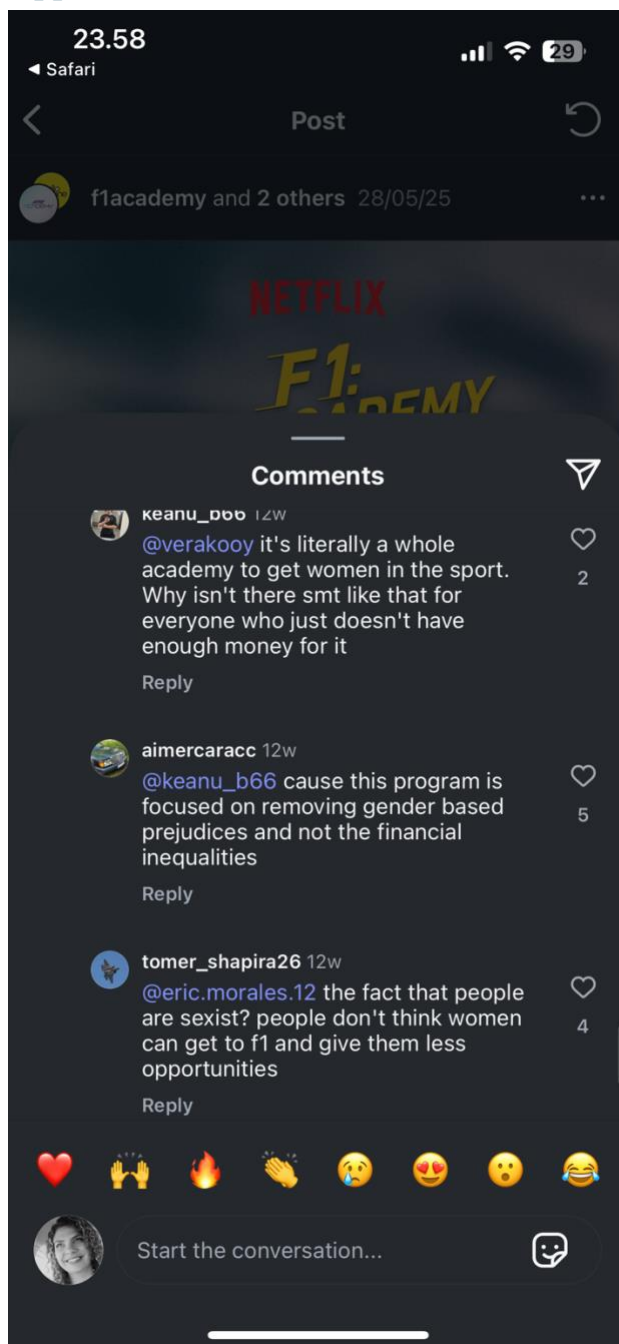
Appendix 12a



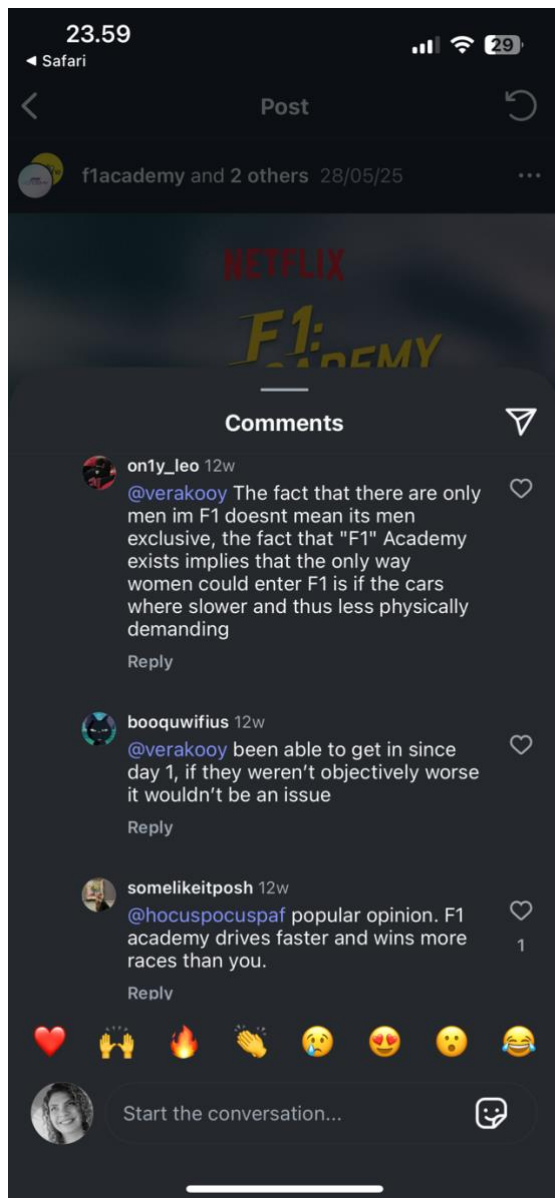
Appendix 12b



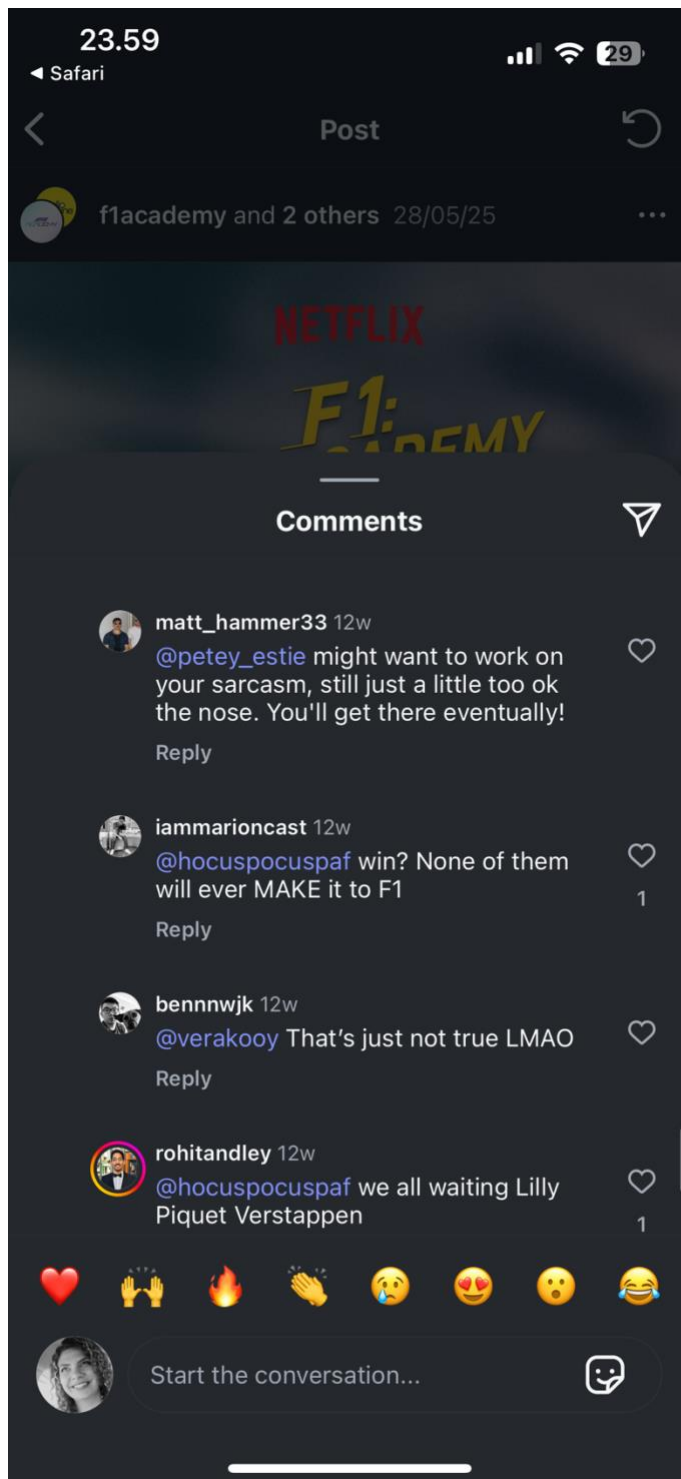
Appendix 12c



Appendix 12d



Appendix 12e



Appendix 12f

