

# ***‘No tits in the pits!’ Women’s motivations to push through challenges and break the glass ceiling in motorsports in the United States***



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## **Abstract**

This investigation emphasized the motivations women who broke the glass ceiling in motorsports in the United States had to keep pushing through difficulties in this male-dominated field. The aim of this exploratory study was to emphasize how the context may affect women’s experiences within the highly unexplored context of motorsports in the United States. The focus was on their motivations to continue pursuing a career in this industry despite increased challenges of this male-dominated field. A phenomenological design was used to assess the lived experiences of sixteen of the highest-ranked women on the management side of motorsports. Their lived experiences were collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews and then analyzed via constant comparison thematic analysis. Findings evidenced that the motivation to continue pursuing a career in motorsports was strongly associated with the racing lifestyle, which was defined as the unique lifestyle and bonds created amongst those who work in racing. The lifestyle is characterized by a sense of community, risk involved, and a family-orientation. Theoretical implications to extend the analytical framework offered in Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) and a motor-sport-specific model are offered.

***Keywords: motorsports, auto racing, racing lifestyle, gender issues in sports, women in sports***

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## 1. Introduction

Motorsports are amongst the largest types of sports internationally (Ross et al., 2009), containing a wide range of competitive sporting events that involve the use of motorized vehicles (e.g., auto and motorcycle racing). *Motorsports* is used to define the entire racing industry, such as to include the engineering and service businesses that support racing (Cobbs & Hylton, 2012). The most famous and popular series globally are auto racing competitions promoted through different series, e.g., Formula 1 (F1) and National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) (Cobbs & Hylton, 2012; Pflugfelder, 2009). In the United States, the NASCAR series has some of the most attended sporting events in the country, in addition to a consistent television audience (Howell & Miller, 2014).

The motorsports industry has several unique features beyond the use of motorized vehicles that distinguish it from other sports. Some examples are the tight racing community that meets in the pits for races across nations, or within the United States for series like NASCAR. Those involved in motorsports live a racing lifestyle following teams throughout intense and long race seasons. The meaning of teams is different from other sports as well, given the high risks involved in these sports (i.e., safety of drivers, and financial risks). A *team* is composed by several people that come together to ensure that the car and the driver are ready and safe at the starting line (e.g., engineers, management, sponsors, mechanics), and not necessarily those who are “playing” or are competing on the field, which is the case in sports like baseball and soccer. Furthermore, having a competitive car at the starting line is expensive, which illuminates the substantial reliance of teams and the industry on sponsors (Young et al., 2013), who would be part of the *team* in its definition within the realm of motorsports. The emotional and financial investments from several parties in this puzzle shape the remarkable connection existent within teams. This emotional bond extends to and permeates throughout the whole industry, where adrenaline- and risk-

loving like-minded personalities come together.

Similar to the definition of a *team* in motorsports, there is something to be said about a special definition for racing families. A racing family goes beyond one’s team or organization, to include those who work in the field for a variety of organization types, such as sanctioning bodies, teams, tracks, sponsors, media, etc. The community-orientation in racing is consequently directly linked to a common passion for adrenaline and the risk involved in these high-speed sports, where a minor error can cost a lot, i.e., financially and/or driver’s safety. This bond is maintained through the intense and long race schedule each season. The industry is considered small and tight because those who are part of competing *teams*, and who come together to form the NASCAR or IndyCar *racing families*, become a *traveling circus*, which is the definition used for the group of people who travel to races around the country each season. Hence, a passion for motorsports and its community is a must for those working in racing because the industry is intense and, among other things, requires enduring long hours of work, numerous weekends away, acceptance of high risks, adrenaline, and becoming part of community.

Remarkably, motorsports and its peculiar racing community are yet to be examined in academic literature (Anderson, 2018). Besides, the industry is an outstanding context to examine gender issues and gendered experiences given that, unlike most professional sports, men and women compete in the same class in numerous prestigious series, such as in the NASCAR Cup Series (Ferguson et al., 2019; Howell & Miller, 2014). Although gender equality is implied, drivers (Kochanek et al., 2021) and decisionmakers, for example team owners and managers, are still mostly men globally (Matthews & Pike, 2016).

There is still a “limited academic understanding of female involvement in the social world of motorsports” (Matthews & Pike, 2016, p. 1532), which is surprising given the singularity of these competitions to investigate gender issues within sports, its popularity in the United States and glob

ally (Kochanek et al., 2021), and the significant proportion of fans and consumers of motorsports that are women (Howell & Miller, 2014). Nevertheless, this study aimed to add to the scarce academic literature centering on motorsports by exploring the experiences of the almost invisible women decision makers in U.S. motorsports, focusing on their motivations to remain in the industry despite challenges in this male-dominated field that is full of singularities.

## 2. Literature Review

### *The Business of Motorsports*

Women's potential remains largely untapped in the sports industry, particularly in motorsports, which is underrepresented in sport management literature (Mikkonen, 2019). Understanding the nuances of the motorsports industry, particularly the racing lifestyle, is crucial for analyzing how these factors influence women's career paths.

In the United States, motorsports competitions are run and depend on its operators and the teams in specific series. For example, NASCAR is the sanctioning organization for stock car racing in the United States and other countries (Amato et al., 2005). Different from the business model of other major leagues in the country (e.g., National Basketball Association, the NBA), the NASCAR Series operates within a capitalistic entrepreneurial system where teams enter and exit the series each year depending on their own capacity to get funding to go racing (Cobbs & Hylton, 2012). The viability of the current model is consequently highly dependent on the series operator and its respective teams consistently delivering sponsorship value both business-to-consumer and business-to-business.

Finn (2021) claimed that the cost of the highest level of motorsport competitions has been exponentially rising with teams increasing their budgets to improve performance on the track. The funding of these extremely expensive competitions is a combination of sources, including sponsors, corporate partners, and media rights. To illustrate, F1 championship-winning team Mercedes had a budget of around U\$405 million in

2020 (Finn, 2021).

The growth of motorsports, i.e., expenditures and market, are credited to enhanced advertisement and sponsorship deals (Market Data Forecast, 2021). Following the significant role of sponsorships and investments in maintaining this industry, teams are responsible for the majority of research and design (R&D) efforts given their interest on growing series (Market Data Forecast, 2021), consequently research has concentrated on marketing concerns (Cobbs & Hylton, 2012; Finn, 2021). Likewise, the majority of studies in academic literature that examined this industry are found within sports marketing (e.g., Amato et al., 2005; Cobbs & Hylton, 2012; Ross et al., 2009). Yet, management issues remain largely disregarded in research, including the lack of diversity on the management side of the industry.

Although racing fans in the United States have long been portrayed as a “socially and politically conservative, anti-intellectual NASCAR Dad, who sits in front of ‘the tube’” (Howell & Miller, 2014, p. 144), motorsports have a solid and diverse consumer base that has remained considerable over the years and is passed through generations (IEG, 2021). For example, women make up 40-42% of NASCAR and 44% of Formula 1 fans (Howell & Miller, 2014; Roper, 2022; Townes, 2019). Motorsports organizations recognize that there is a need to dedicate efforts to diversify its management to attend its current fanbase and extend its reach (Townes, 2019), agreeing that sport organizations benefit from welcoming diversity (Cunningham & Fink, 2006; Fink et al., 2003; Wicker et al., 2012, 2020). As an example of such efforts, NASCAR has added a Multicultural Development division and has created the Driver's for Diversity program to target groups outside its traditional fans (Townes, 2019). Another example is the Accelerate 25 recently launched by Mercedes that aims to hire at least 25% of new employees from underrepresented groups (Lewis, 2021).

### ***Peculiarities of Motorsports: Families and a Shared Love for Motorsports***

Most studies in sport management have assessed family as an impediment to women's career success on the business side of sports (Leberman & Palmer, 2009; Pfister & Radtke, 2009; Weight et al., 2021). Even though motorsports have not received much academic research attention, interviews conducted by different websites reveal a common thread: women's introduction to motorsports and the development of their fandom is almost always rooted in family traditions. To illustrate, Julie Giese, who currently leads the Phoenix Raceway and is one of the most influential women in NASCAR, indicates that her introduction to the sport happened at home as a fan: "I grew up in this sport...I was raised a race fan and I wanted to just do anything I could [to work in the sport]" (Phoenix Raceway, 2021). Susie Wolf, who competed in Formula 1 and is now a team CEO in Formula E, seemingly suggested that her family introduced her to racing (Sinclair, 2014).

Kochanek et al. (2021) interviewed women drivers and found a similar narrative. The family support, especially the father influence, was key in the drivers' introduction to motorsports. To illustrate, the noteworthy American driver Hailie Deegan, who was the only woman racing the Lucas Oil Off Road Pro series in 2022, described some of her first memories in racing: "I was about to turn eight. I remember going to my dad's off-road truck races, and these little kids are racing in these mini off-road trucks" (Women of Speed, 2021). This idea agrees with the social learning theory, which explains that we learn and develop through others via social interactions (Dou et al., 2020). Likewise, a sport marketing study compared NFL fans and found that, for women, football and team fandom were heavily influenced and shaped by parents, who described watching football as a family event (Shane-Nichols et al., 2020).

Previous authors have found a connection between being member of a family and the shared love for a sport or a team (Ratten, 2020; Roper,

2022). This idea can be summarized as "the connection to family that makes us interested in sports" (Ratten, 2020, p. 7). This generational bond family-sport and/or family-team characterize relational bonds and shared values (Ratten, 2020, p. 3). The notoriety of the shared value of racing amongst families is supported by women fans of F1, who claim that missing a race "is not an option, it would be like missing Christmas with the family, impossible" (Roper, 2022). The attachment to sports, teams, and organizations is key to the industry, both for fans and consumers, as well as for workers and producers, who accept suboptimal job conditions due to emotional attachment and personal significance of the job (Hawzen et al., 2018). This attachment is often connected to family and rooted in memories. In Hawzen et al., (2018), a participant shed light on the connection between family and his attachment to sports: "I think about me and Dad going to a baseball game and just walking out and seeing that atmosphere...it gives me purpose" (p. 200). Remarkably, these social and affective factors that compose attachment to sports and teams are often discussed within the team identity scholarship (e.g., Delia & James, 2017), in detriment of analyses of the role of family in the socialization process and introduction to sports (Mercado, 2008), or career decisions to work on the management side of the field, or how this emotional bond to sports and family may particularly influence women's career decisions (Ratten, 2020). These considerations are relevant when considering women who work in the male-dominated industry of motorsports despite enhanced challenges in the space.

### **3. Methodology**

The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of women who are decision makers in motorsports in the United States. The emphasis is on their motivation to endure despite enhanced challenges present in this male-dominated industry. In order to guide the research methods and gain in-depth understanding of the experiences of the target population, while consid-

ering the nuances of the context, one main research question guided the study:

**RQ** Why do women continue pursuing decision-making roles in motorsports despite challenges?

The investigation emphasized how the nuances of the motorsports industry affect women's career paths because examining challenges faced and coping mechanisms used to get to the top did not tell the whole story about their pathways in this peculiar context. The enhanced challenges women face when working on the management side of motorsports and the mechanisms used to cope with those were explored by Lopes (2024). The main findings of the study illuminated that chal-

lenges at the societal and individual levels were the most prominent. Coping mechanisms used to navigate these challenges were described as informal, mainly concentrated at the interpersonal and individual levels, and particular to motorsports, i.e., racing community and the racing lifestyle. Figure 1 summarizes the main findings in Lopes (2024). Challenges (identified as “-” in Figure 1) and coping mechanisms (identified as “+” in Figure 1) are organized among the four categories in the framework advanced by Ragins and Sundstrom (1989). The aim of this study was to extend this framework to account for the context of motorsports in the experiences of women

**Figure 1.** *Motivators (identified by ‘\*’) women have to continue pursuing a career on the management side of U.S. motorsports despite challenges (identified by ‘-’) and the coping mechanisms (identified by ‘+’) they rely on*

<p><b>Societal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Gender stereotypes</li> <li>-Sexism</li> <li>-Unconscious bias</li> <li>-Hegemonic masculinity</li> <li>-Lack-of-fit</li> </ul> <p>+Societal wave of change</p>	<p><b>Organizational</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Token status</li> <li>-Glass cliff</li> </ul> <p>+Organizations that value DEI</p>
<p><b>Interpersonal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Old Boys Club</li> <li>-Queen Bee</li> </ul> <p>+Community of women in motorsports</p> <p>+Role models</p> <p>+Allyship (men and women)</p> <p>+Mentors</p> <p>+Support systems</p> <p>+Social skills</p>	<p><b>Individual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Work-life balance</li> <li>-Motherhood</li> <li>-Impostor phenomenon</li> </ul> <p>+Type A personalities (overachievers)</p> <p>+Well-rounded portfolio</p> <p>+Separating personal and professional lives</p> <p>+Confidence building through professional maturity</p> <p>+Reframe challenge as positive</p> <p>+Competing in the sport</p> <p>+Clear communication without confrontation</p> <p>+Be part of the change you want to see</p> <p>+Learn to speak the language</p> <p>+Intrinsic motivation</p> <p>+It can be a “fit” rather than a balance</p> <p>+Take risks</p>



working in decision making positions, specifically what motivated them to stay in the industry despite enhanced challenges.

### ***Research Approach***

This study underlined the experiences of women decision makers in U.S. motorsports via an exploratory qualitative approach. This approach attended a call for studies on the experiences of underrepresented groups in sport management (Singer et al., 2019; Slack, 1996; Olafson, 1990), while paralleling methods previously used to assess women's experiences on the management side of sports (e.g., Hovden, 2010). A phenomenological research design (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) was employed due to the importance of accounting for the context while exploring women's careers (Powell & Maniero, 1992). Hence, views, experiences, reflections, motivations, emotions and sentiments were gathered in the data collection to answer the research question proposed. Participants shared their experiences as they wished, agreeing that knowledge-generation happens through human experience (Nowell et al., 2018). Analytic generalization, rather than statistical generalization, is offered. Thus, findings can be applied to, or associated with, similar concrete situations (Yin, 2018).

### ***Data Collection***

Interviews, which were all conducted by the researcher herself and held over a three-week period, lasted between 45-75min. The timing of the data collection coincided with an extremely busy time in the racing season, with the Indy 500 2022 happening during those weeks. This event limited the time participants had for meetings and made the recruitment of participants more challenging. All interviews, and pilot interviews, were conducted via the online software Zoom given time and travel constraints. The platform was chosen given its user friendliness, accessible interface, cost- and time-effectiveness, data and security management options (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020).

**Interview Protocol.** Interviews assessed experiences from participants' introduction to motorsports, their career path in the industry, to their current role. A semi-structured interview protocol was employed as it prompted fruitful discussions and facilitated a conversational collection of participants' stories. While it allowed for certain flexibility, the protocol maintained consistency across interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Besides, participants were able to guide the discussion to some extent, such as by focusing on certain areas and developing more on topics that were important to them. This was key given that women have different storylines in motorsports. The structure allowed participants to ask questions, raise concerns, and add their views as they wished to, which helped building trust in the research process and the researcher as well. Questions offered were open-ended, and broadly stated, agreeing with phenomenology premises (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited based on gender (women), country where they worked (United States), role (i.e., decision-making), and industry (motorsports), characterizing a purposeful sample. The sample comprised women who held positions with decision-making power, such as managers, directors, and owners. Participants worked across different types of organizations within motorsports, such as teams, sanctioning bodies, and tracks, and among different series in the United States, such as IndyCar and NASCAR. Finding potential participants that fulfilled all criteria was challenging given the limited number of women on the management side of motorsports. Recruitment started with connections of the researcher and LinkedIn searches. Then, a snowball sampling was employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection stopped with 16 interviewees because saturation of information was reached, and themes were well-developed and supported by the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim to ensure

that participant's intended language and speech was preserved (Giorgi, 2009).

**Participants.** Participants interviewed were 16 of the highest-ranked women on the management side of motorsports in the United States, with the average of 22 years of work experience in the field. These women were highly prominent names in the industry and held key decision-making roles. Detailed information about participants is

found on Table 1. Some participants did not disclose their exact roles because of the sensitive information shared, and their notoriety in the field.

**Positionality.** The positionality of the researcher as a research and interpretation tool is acknowledged, such as her influence in the research process and how she was influenced by it during data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Both the context and the topic cho

**Table 1**  
*Participants*

Participant	Age	Marital-Status	# of Kids	Former driver	Racing family	Highest Degree	Years in motorsports	Current Role	Inter-view duration (min)
Ayla	51	Divorced	1	No	No (early intro)	Associate Business	22	Director Business Development	62
Bia	62	Separated	1	No	No (early intro)	Masters in Kinesiology	30	CE	45
Diana	48	Single	0	No	No (early intro)	MBA	12	Upper Management	45
Ella	42	Single	0	No	No (early intro)	BA Psychology	13	VP, Business Development	55
Gianna	55	Single	1	No	No (early intro)	BAS	35	Sponsorship Consultant	52
Heidi	44	Married	1	No	Yes	Doctorate	25	Director of Marketing	56
Joy	52	Married	4	No	No	BSBA	13	CFO and Co-owner	48
Kia	42	Divorced	3	No	Yes	Bachelors	2	President and founder	45
Lola	46	Married	2	Hobby	Yes	BBA Marketing	25	Owner/President	60
Maria	47	Married	0	Yes	Yes	BA Communications	30	COO	45
Nina	32	Single	0	No	No	BS Sports Management	10	Director, Partnership Marketing	60
Paige	44	Single	0	No	No	BS	21	President/VP	45
Rosie	60	Single	0	No	Yes	Incomplete college	40	CEO	60
Sofia	65	Widow	1	Yes	No (early intro)	Incomplete college	51	Mid/Upper Management	60
Yara	36	Married	0	No	Yes	Bachelor of Arts	16	VP, Events Operation	75
Zaya	52	Married	6	No	No (early intro)	BBA	7	Product Manager	60

sen came from the author's personal interest and industry connections. The author grew up in a family with a professional motocross athlete, and she identifies as a woman interested in investigating gender issues in sport management to foster gender diversity in the industry. The researcher is Latina, which echoes her interest in producing

knowledge through voices of underrepresented groups via qualitative approaches.

**Trustworthiness.** The validation of qualitative research comprises processes that attempt to reach accuracy and trustworthiness of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Trustworthiness is concerned

with the acceptability and usefulness of the findings presented (Nowell et al., 2017). The present study followed several steps to ensure that the data truthfully represented multiple constructions relying upon participants' perspectives, following suggestions by Lincoln and Guba (1985). For instance, analytic memos were kept alongside the coding process and used in the data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and authenticity was met given that participants' experiences guided interviews (Lincoln et al., 2011).

### Data Analysis

A thematic analysis with constant comparison following the steps suggested by Percy et al. (2015) was followed. First, coding helped the researcher make sense of the text data and narrow down information that was relevant for the study from each of the interviews (Creswell, 2012). Direct quotes from participants (i.e., in vivo codes) that related to the research question, in addition to sentiments and emotions (i.e., descriptive codes), attendant to the research question, were gathered.

The research question centered on participants' motivations to continue pursuing a career in motorsports despite challenges. Descriptions that reflected their motivation were mainly expressed as an emotional attachment to motorsports. Participants expanded on and expressed their connection to the industry largely through emotions, memories, and feelings, such as *memories with their families at the track, ties to the racing community, racing family, the highs and lows of racing, passion for racing and the lifestyle, the team element, the adrenaline and risks involved, soothing, and a constant in life*. Once all interviews had been coded, patterns that emerged were combined into a higher-order theme that answered the research question (Percy et al., 2015). The theme that summarized participants' motivations is representative of the nuances of the industry and was therefore entitled *Racing Lifestyle*.

## 4. Results

All participants claimed that their motivation

and eagerness to continue pursuing a career in motorsports was not to get to a particular level or role, but they were attracted to features of the racing industry and its lifestyle. Despite its effect on their work-life balance, all participants asserted that living the racing lifestyle was their choice and described it in positive terms. Zaya said that: "There's a quote by Steve McQueen that says: racing is life, everything else is just waiting. When you're in racing, it really kind of takes over your life." Their descriptions oftentimes included sentiments towards the industry as well. Terms such as *comfort, soothing, safeness, belonging, a constant in life, memories growing up with loved ones, shared feelings, connection to fathers*, were used by participants several times to express the meaning of motorsports to them. For instance, Gianna claimed that her motivation and passion for working in racing was rooted in the intensity, adrenaline, and the high stakes involved (e.g., driver's safety and financial risks for teams), which, to her, differ from other sports.

Ella compared a career in racing to a "normal" job and highlighted the nonstop mentality in their field: "I don't care how long you've been in the industry or how little - it's a lifestyle. The thing is you don't sign up for it to be like a 9 to 5. If that's the case, go work at a bank. Because working in live entertainment and sports, and especially motorsports, it's 365, 24/7." Joy expanded on this idea by providing a comprehensive description of what the lifestyle entailed for her, while expressing her emotional connection to the industry,

I appreciate all the highs and lows that happen with it. I mean, it's so intense. I love the fact that you have to have the lifestyle, it's not a job, it's a lifestyle. And when you work that hard, and those long hours, and there's so much invested in what's happening [...] then we come together, and it's this huge family. The things that happen when you go through those highs and lows of emotion, during the states of deprivation, make you bond tighter than you do in most normal workplaces in such a short period



of time [...]. In all of the places that I've worked at, I was close with the people I worked with, but again, adding that flavor of first of all, there's genuine risk involved, which means that there's really high emotions, which means you have to work really hard to be perfect to keep people safe. And so there's just a lot of these pressure factors that again, make for this incredible bonding experience that happens, it's completely unique.

Maria's takeover of the family business in racing further explains the existent care for each other within the racing community. She decided to run the family racetrack because she wanted to preserve the environment for the local racing community and allow them to have access to racing as she did growing up. Nevertheless, she explained that racing was key in her personal development, and she wanted others to have access to that environment too. A similar story was shared by Lola, who moved back home to manage her family racetrack. Although participants did not talk about specific roles they aspired to get to, being decision makers allowed them to be active part of the change they wanted to see in the space, which motivated them to establish and the to continue pursuing a career in motorsports despite challenges. This idea connects to participants' desire to pursue intrinsically rewarding careers and give back to an industry that meant so much to them and their families. Joy explained that she believes that *giving back* is a feeling not singular to women in motorsports, "I believe that most of the women that I have contact with get to a certain point in life, in their careers, and many men as well, but women typically find themselves reinvigorated by causes and doing things that are bigger than themselves." Diana summarized a feeling of responsibility to change the industry, which was echoed by all participants, because of how much racing has meant in her life, "I want to do more. I want to almost give back to everything that racing did for me. It's been this joy. It's been this constant. It's been this comfort. It's now been my extended family. And so I feel like I'm almost paying it back."

If more women were on the management side of motorsports, participants believed that several issues that go unseen by men in the industry could improve. Lola is an example of that. She talked about ongoing projects to make her track more welcoming for families, and not just racers. Her renovations included planting trees and developing better accommodation options in the area. She explained that,

separate from the racing, there isn't really an environment or much to do for people that are there just to support the drivers. And I think if there were more women, innately they would be bringing in other things for people in the families to do, in ways that would make it more of a family situation. Now it seems like a kind of exclusive thing where men don't want women there because there's not that much to do and then they feel like they have to entertain their wives. And then I hear that as a team owner, a fair amount, it is difficult [...] So I think that one of the changes could be women making that whole environment something that is more family-friendly.

The people in the industry were underlined by several participants as a key part of the racing lifestyle and a key motivator for them to continue pursuing a career in the field. Several participants described that the people in the industry tend to bond as they are mostly all type A or overachievers sharing a passion for racing and the emotions that come with it. Diana explained this idea: "in motorsports, everyone up and down that paddock, usually we're all type A personalities, we're all overachievers. You don't get to be in the Indy 500 unless you're an overachiever. So, then it's like the overachiever group gets together." Participants highlighted the shared bond that is created between those like-minded who come together in motorsports. Paige emphasized the importance of the racing community for her: "[what] I love about our sport, especially now, after the time that I've spent in it is just how great the people are, and how much passion there is from anyone you

come in contact with.”

Given that those working in motorsports meet several weekends in a year for races, the bond established is maintained. These relationships tend to be the main friendships of those involved in the industry as well, because they do not have many weekends off to spend at home. Heidi explained the importance of forming bonds in racing, given the numerous weekends traveling and the difficulty of establishing such bonds in one’s local community “Our friends are all over the country. We don’t have a lot of friends in our local community [...] it was just a different lifestyle. But I will tell you to ask us what restaurants were in our neighborhood, we couldn’t even tell you because we weren’t home long enough to go to any of them.”

Besides, those who work in motorsports tend to relocate a lot for work, further restricting rooting in certain places and building relationships in one’s local community. These relocations are usually to key locations in the United States where tracks, teams or sanctioning bodies are located, such as Charlotte and Indianapolis. Nonetheless, racing is more than work, it is where family and friends are as well, and where leisure time is spent too. Most of the leisure for those who work in this industry tends to be on race weekends, i.e., at the pit area with friends from other teams, or getting to know the city where they are for a race. The industry is considered one big family, where people know and support each other.

The established community reveals the family-orientation existent in racing as well. Lola and Rosie mentioned that the family-orientation is one of their favorite aspects in racing. Rosie described the environment: “There were always lots of other kids to play with and all the parents helped each other, and we cook out and there’d be parties and the kids would play and we’d ride mini bikes and bicycles, and it was just always a fun and friendly, nice loving community.” Not only those who grew up in racing shared the importance of the family-orientation of the field, but all participants revealed that they were emotionally connected to

people in the industry and considered the community an extended family, a racing family, or a racing village. Lola described that her children were raised by the racing village: “When they talk about it takes a village, we have our huge village, it’s just a racing village.” Diana illustrated this idea when she said that she has spent several holidays with her extended family, rather than her own family, because those holidays happened in race weekends “it’s a traveling circus and they become this extended friends and family. I mean, I’ve had Thanksgivings with these people.”

Participants who grew up in racing families reported that motorsports were a shared bond that they have with their parents, siblings, and loved ones. Working in the industry consequently kept these childhood memories and feelings alive. One participant described the intrinsic value of her career by saying that leaving racing would be extremely hard since for her it meant *letting go of childhood memories at the track and a shared bond with her family*.

Diana introduced a concept that describes those who are involved in racing: the traveling circus. This circus is a close-knit community, where everyone knows everyone. The term characterizes the closeness of an exciting and chaotic like-minded group of people who have common interests and who meet all year around in races across the country. Heidi explains that:

A traveling circus means you pick up the same cohort of people, and they go from city to city together. And when they’re in those cities together, they’re in the same paddock or same garage area together. So they pass each other for four days straight every weekend or three days, whatever. And they just know everyone, everybody knows everybody, you go to dinner together, you stay in the same hotel together. [...] And that really impacts getting work done. I never appreciated how much knowing everybody makes your job so much easier, you can just pick up the phone and get things done because our world is relationship driven.

Heidi offered that the circus is a uniqueness of racing as she compared the industry to other sports, such as when she worked with the Major League Baseball (MLB) later in her career. To illustrate such differences, Heidi compared several factors of motorsports to her experience working in baseball,

I'm working the MLB All Star game because we were title sponsor of the T Mobile, Home Run Derby. And I get there and I discover, in baseball you've got all these teams, they all play in different cities at different times, when you're actually at a game as like, the players are in their locker room. And the sponsors are all in a different suite, there is no garage area per se, where everybody's just mingling around the media center is about as close as you get or the press box is about as close as you get to it. And all the journalists know each other, but they don't then interact with players in the sponsors versus like in a garage area and motorsports just all those different career paths mingled together, you know, the nurses, you know, the safety team, you know everybody, that was a big, big difference. [...] the second thing that was a big, big eye opener for me was being on the sponsor side. I always knew it, but I didn't really appreciate it. Motorsports truly is built on sponsors. And motorsports groups truly know that they cannot fund their company without sponsor dollars. So they treat sponsors really, really well. Go to like baseball or football or even venues and stuff. They can, they can live without sponsors, right? And like sponsors are nice to have, but that's just the icing on the cake. And so they actually don't, I don't want to be disrespectful, but they don't actually treat their sponsors great. They're still learning how to treat their sponsors. So it was an eye opener for me being like you're the top dog, if you're a sponsor at a NASCAR event. Then you walk into any of these other sports and they're like, you don't really belong here. You're not actually in sports. You're a sponsor. So that was interesting.

Ella added that, “motorsport truly has a team element to it [...] a next level of team that comes into play when you look at motorsports and what goes into everything for that driver to be able to get in the car, and go fast and perform.” She further described the definition of a team in this environment and why she believed the team element is singular and different from other sports,

there's so many things on the back end that have to come together. I think it's just the uniqueness of there are so many different opportunities within motor sport, to play a role in in the success of what's going on with it, whether you're on the team side, like I am, whether you're on the property side, at a racetrack, you're getting the experience to the fan, you have all of these different careers from being an engineer to it to on the business side, PR and marketing sales. There's just so many different elements that come into play that really ultimately drives the success of motorsports.

Diana stressed the numerous roles within a team, which are both on the business side and on-the-track, “I like to say my team is 30 people. One of them is a driver, 29 are not drivers.” Joy underlined the unique team aspect in racing numerous times, connecting it back to the idea of a racing family “We refer to it [team] as family, because to the rest of the world, when they hear team, they think we mean our drivers. And when I say team, I’m talking about the staff. So my definition of team are all of us that lean on each other to build something better.” All participants agreed with the team aspect in racing, and they all felt that they belonged to the team, regardless of their role in the organization they worked for.

## 5. Discussion

Findings alluded to an emotional attachment to motorsports, and the multilayered and unique-to-the-industry racing lifestyle, that motivated participants to continue pursuing a career in this male-dominated field amidst challenges. Different from

findings Doherty's (2004) study, who found that working long hours and weekends was a major issue for women in the workplace, participants did not complain about their demanding careers in racing. Participants clearly highlighted that one cannot fake a passion for motorsports to work in the industry because the racing lifestyle takes over all aspects of your life, which is an extreme case of the permeability between personal and professional in women's lives (Powell & Maniero, 1992). Participants believed that to succeed in on the management side of motorsports women need "an all-encompassing passion for just about everything that revolves around" it (Jenkins et al., 2005, p. 52)

This lifestyle, which has yet to be investigated in academic literature, is particular to racing, and consequently, the motivators found in the present study are unique to motorsports (and not other sports). For instance, this lifestyle entails work-related relocations and trips all over the country for races, nonexistent holidays, and a nonstop-work mentality, suggesting a completely different lifestyle than a "normal" career. Several participants referred to the travelling circus as their extended family, which supports the feeling of belonging. This bond goes beyond one's team, to encompass the whole industry. People in motorsports meet most weekends in a year, spend holidays together, and are barely at home. Nonetheless, both their work and personal lives happen at races. Participants described their social life as walking the pits and stopping in a garage to have a beer or going for dinner at the city where the race is happening with people from the industry. Racing becomes their social environment too. The racing lifestyle and its multiple facets was therefore pronounced to be the foundation to the motivation to keep pursuing a career in the industry, despite enhanced challenges in this male-dominated field.

The emotional attachment to motorsports and the alike personalities (adrenaline- and risk-loving overachievers, etc.) of those who work in motorsports continue to enlighten participants' enjoyment of the lifestyle, which is shared amongst the

racing community. This emotional attachment was described as a shared bond between those involved with motorsports. The racing community was described as constituted of one-of-a-kind personalities (i.e., overachievers, type A), a family-orientation (i.e., extended family, racing family, racing village), and the feeling of being part of something bigger than oneself (i.e., team element in motorsports).

Similarly, Waltemeyer (2018) inquired *how women's lived experiences impacted their decision to pursue a career in motorsports*. The emergent themes in her study shed light on the importance of interpersonal relationships. Her findings enlightened us that the culture in motorsports (i.e., family-orientation) was important in women's decision to work in the field. Likewise, the racing community, and interpersonal relationships in the industry, were highly regarded by participants in the present study as motivators to keep pushing amidst challenges.

In the present study, women's desire to continue building a career in motorsports was enhanced by strong bonds between participants' memories growing up and racing as a shared bond with loved ones. Working in sports kept these memories and feelings alive. From memories growing up, to their extended racing family, racing was described as a *constant in life* by several participants. Mercado (2008) detected a similar sense of security (i.e., familism) to be a value found in sports. Therefore, present findings evidenced the importance of interpersonal relationships and the lifestyle in motivating women to continue pursuing a career in motorsports (supporting results in Waltemeyer, 2018), agreeing that women's experiences in the workplace are strongly impacted by relationships and the context (Powell & Maniero, 1992).

Agreeing with the idea of an existent emotional attachment in sports (Stewart & Smith, 1999), participants characterized their motivation to pursue a career in racing using words such as, *adrenaline, excitement, unpredictability, and risks involved*. Feelings, emotions, and memories were therefore the main motivators throughout their careers in



this male-dominated field. Nonetheless, women, who tend to prefer intrinsically rewarding careers (Cortes & Pan, 2018), revealed their desire to give back to racing given that it was so important in their own personal developments. Thus, giving back to the industry, such as by becoming advocates for diversity, fulfilled women's desire for intrinsically rewarding careers. In sum, participants were motivated to go above and beyond and use their roles to help the industry grow and flourish, which is beneficial for organizations, and the industry as a whole.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

Given that women are a minority group in motorsports (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989), they face enhanced challenges, and their career path could be defined as an obstacle course (Kanter, 1977) or a career labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) in this industry. Hence, women who do achieve top management roles may represent exceptional cases of survivors (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). To provide an in-depth depiction of women's career paths in motorsports acknowledging its multiple layers, the four-level analytical framework offered by Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) was used to classify the challenges and coping mechanisms offered by participants (i.e., societal, organizational, interpersonal, and individual). Thus, this study attended a call for multi-level analyses on the management side of sports (Burton, 2015; Welty Peachy et al., 2015). However, detailing the challenges faced and the coping mechanisms used to get to decision-making roles did not tell the whole story of why these women kept pushing through difficulties in motorsports. There was more to their stories that did not fit into these four levels.

There was an emotional attachment to motorsports and the lifestyle. The motivation women have to continue pursuing a career in motorsports despite challenges do not mirror previous studies from parent disciplines that centered on male-dominated fields, but they agree to certain extent with previous studies in sport management that in-

vestigated emotional aspects and bonds with sports. For instance, Todd and Kent (2009) examined the emotional significance of group membership that sport employees have, which motivates them to remain working in the field amidst difficulties, e.g., highly demanding careers (e.g., long hours), lower pay, highly competitive job market (Hawzen et al., 2018). However, the racing lifestyle is particular to the context of motorsports and is not replicated in other sports. To express this singularity, and tell the complete story of women who work on the management side of U.S. motorsports, an additional level representing the *motorsports industry* was added to the original framework offered by Ragins and Sundstrom in 1989 (see Figure 2). This approach is similar to Mikkonen (2019), who used the same framework to assess the experiences of women leaders in soccer in Finland and Norway. The addition of this level reveals the importance of considering the context when certain industries, such as sports, are considered (i.e., different from other fields where the framework has been used, such as management in Peus et al., 2015).

In sum, challenges (identified as “-” in Figure 2) and coping mechanisms (identified as “+” in Figure 2) may not be sufficient to explain *why* women continue pursuing a career on the management side of some contexts, such as sports, since those may fail to reflect emotional aspects. These challenges and coping mechanisms were suggested by Lopes (2024). This study built on Lopes' findings to incorporate motivators to remain in the industry despite enhanced challenges in this male-dominated field. Nonetheless, a motorsport-specific model is offered in Figure 2. The context of motorsports is proposed as an additional level to the original framework first advanced by Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) and applied to the motorsports context in the United States in Lopes (2024).

### **6. Conclusion**

The main motivators women have to continue pursuing a career on the management side of U.S.

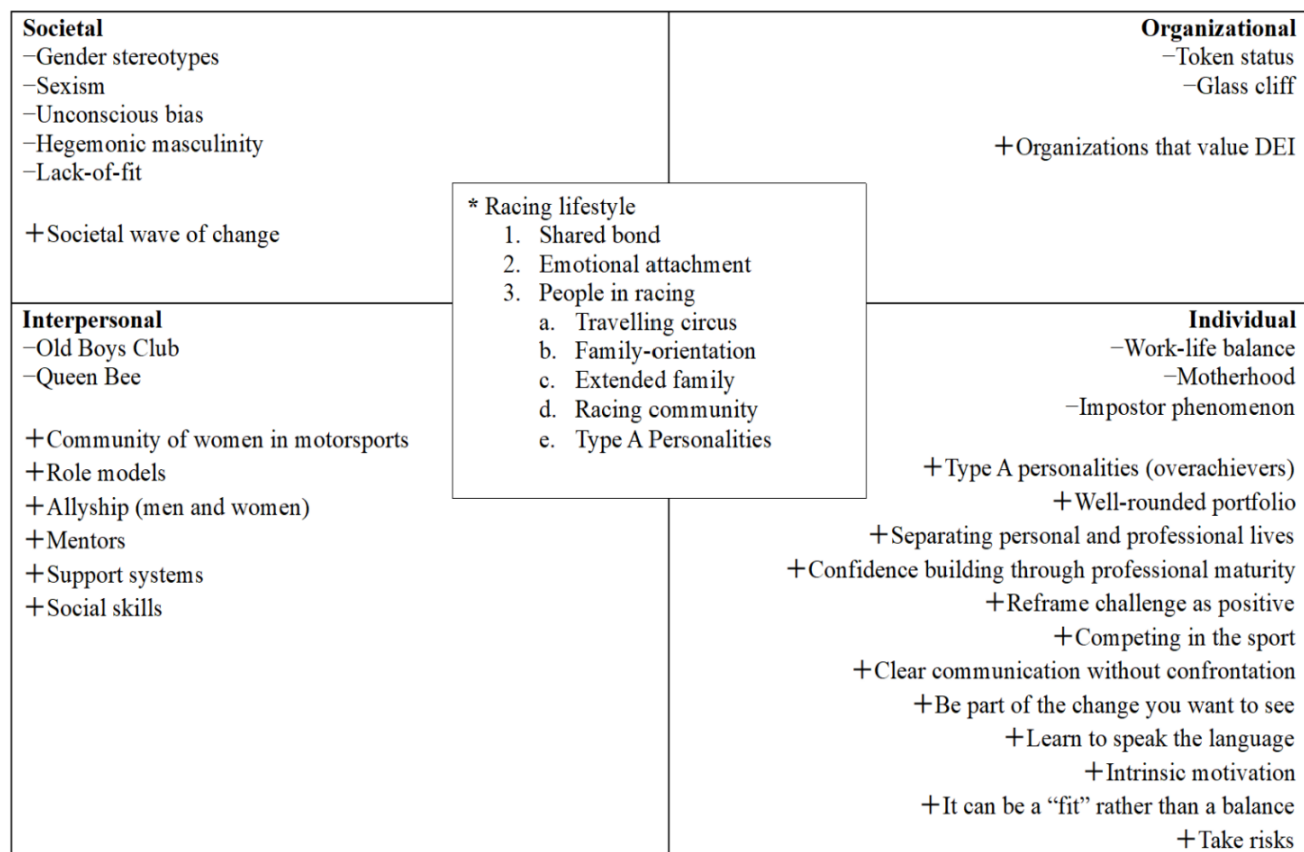


motorsports were found to be related to the racing lifestyle, and what it entails. Findings agreed with findings on emotional bond in sports (e.g., passion and pride, Swanson & Kent. 2017), shared passion and bond with loved ones through sports (Mercado, 2008), and women's preference for intrinsically rewarding careers (Cortes & Pan, 2018). An extension of the analytical framework

in Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), first explored in the context of motorsports in Lopes (2024), was offered to account for nuances of motorsports and how it affects women's career paths in the industry. Findings contribute to the extremely limited academic discussions emphasizing the management side of motorsports, and how the context may shape women's career paths in sports they

**Figure 2**

*Motorsport-specific Framework Building on Lopes (2024) and Incorporating Motivators*



rely on.

### **Limitations**

This study is not without its limitations was conceptualized and data was collected toward the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting to the “new normal.” Due to time and geographical constraints—most participants being on the West

Coast and the researcher on the East Coast—interviews were conducted via Zoom. The sample consisted of sixteen women in decision-making roles within U.S. motorsports, which limited the population under study. Participants were specifically employed in various motorsport organizations (e.g., NASCAR, IndyCar, drag racing) and held positions of power, thus excluding those in lower

or non-managerial roles, as well as volunteers and international organizations. Consequently, race, ethnicity, and other demographics were not analyzed due to the small number of women in decision-making positions. Data collection relied on self-reported information, which could lead to incomplete or hesitant responses due to participants' prominence in the industry. Despite these challenges, efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis, as previously discussed.

### ***Future Research***

To gain deeper insights, future research could replicate these methods in other countries and series, especially given the global success of Formula 1 and the all-female W Series. A cross-country analysis with a larger sample would provide a broader understanding of women's experiences in motorsports globally.

The current study did not specifically address the career phases outlined by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) and how those may change motivations to pursue a career in motorsports. Developing a model focused on women's career phases in sports would be beneficial to gain deeper understanding of their careers. For instance, how the exposure to successful women role models early in their careers could translate to women's professional growth.

Previous research has examined work-life balance and motherhood in sports (Leberman & Palmer, 2009), yet the positive impacts of motherhood on women's well-being have not been thoroughly explored. Participants in this study noted that, despite feeling "mom guilt," they viewed their roles as positive examples for their children. Future research in sport management could focus on the benefits of motherhood on women's well-

being to further understand the intersection of motherhood and a career in sports.

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