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## GUEST EDITORS' COMMENTS

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The guest editors of this issue wish to thank the editor, Dr. Randy Mills, and the editorial board of the *Journal for the Liberal Arts and Sciences* for the opportunity to explore the topic of popular culture as it applies to the automobile and transportation movement.

On first glance, this is an eclectic collection of articles about highways, car movies, and racing. More precisely, the articles seek to examine exploratory issues that very few journals have yet addressed: the popular culture aspect of automobiles and their social and cultural impacts within the transportation system.

The automobile and the ensuing development of transportation systems has had a profound influence upon cultures and societies, especially in the United States. Some of the authors for this special issue are from China, and they note that while there has been an intense discussion about the impact of the automobile and transportation routes on the United States, China too has witnessed profound changes as a result of transportation routes such as the Silk Highway. The Chinese are beginning to rediscover these trade routes and their importance, especially as they impact tourism development.

The first article offers a study of the Dixie Highway in Northwest Ohio, especially in Wood County. The article emphasizes the need to recognize the importance of historic highways and their contributions to redevelopment. The understanding of such transportation routes gives great insight, historically, to the development of local cultures as it relates to communities and their ongoing changes.

The next article is about the movie subculture related to automobiles. Car movies are a reflection of the evolutionary development of the automobile and its influence upon society. The automobile is probably one of the greatest cultural forces upon the structure of modern society, certainly one of the primary social forces of the last century. This trend has extended into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is being adapted to new technologies. How these new technologies will impact societal development is an important question for future exploration.

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The two following articles are about NASCAR racing. This sport is one of the most popular in the United States and has had a profound influence upon the social and cultural fabric of society. The first article examines movies about racing from a historical perspective. It examines the important influences of how a Southern sport has been popularized into a major national sport. The other article is about women in racing and explores the topic of diversity as it relates to the future development of the sport. The article brings to light the hidden potential of women in racing to improve the sport.

The last article, while not touching on the automobile culture, is of importance. It is an essay on senior citizens and their influence upon the current demographic makeup of our culture. These individuals are the baby boomers and they are quickly becoming an older part of the fabric of leadership within our society. Each group, as they retire, has a profound influence upon the culture, its structure and function. This article gives some insight into baby boomers and how they have influenced, and will continue to influence, our society.

Overall, these articles are offered as a start for exploring some of the popular cultural issues related to automobiles and transportation as they relate to cultural and societal issues. Much more investigation is required, and we believe there needs to be a permanent home, in terms of a journal, that explores these issues as a way of developing a scientific base for greater understanding.

Bob Lee, Yu Liu, and David Groves, Guest Editors  
*Bowling Green State University*

# The Dixie Highway

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## **Abstract**

*Based on the review of history of Dixie Highway as well as the comparison research of other highway communities, this study employs the method of discourse analysis to explore the tourism development of Dixie Highway in Northwest Ohio. The data comes from 5 categories: previous history, architecture, libraries, car clubs, and community. The conclusion justifies that historic highways is an opportunity for tourism development if connected with the culture to these highway communities.*

## **Introduction**

Dixie Highway beginnings were a little tenuous, but in this part of the country the consensus is that it's basic planning began in 1915. This issue must be set in the background that the first transcontinental trip was in 1903. After 1903, there was a flurry of development of highways to connect the major population centers across the country (Berger, 2001; Heritmann, 2009). One of these was the connection of north and south and the vision of the Dixie Highway was born. The development of the Dixie Highway resulted in the development of business related to the movement of products and services, as well as the development of vigorous tourism business (Ratchford, 1965).

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dixie Highway (Route 25) in Northwest Ohio was celebrated in May, 2015. This project was sponsored by the Tourism, Event and Leisure Planning Program Bowling Green State University and Discover Toledo. Rogan Murdock was the community organizer and Dr. Bob Lee was the academic organizer. The primary cooperators were the Wood

County District Public Library, the Perrysburg Way Public Library, and Rossford Public Library. The program included a cruise in from North Baltimore, Ohio to Perrysburg, Ohio. This is one of the remaining parts of Route 25 that still has a pristine character. There were stops on the cruise in at several commercial establishments. The primary stop was at the Wood County District Public Library where Russell Rein made a presentation about the history of the Dixie Highway in Northwest Ohio. (Rein, Web) Michele Raine was the organizer of the program at the Wood County District Library There was also a mini car show at the Wood County District Public library. The final stop was at the common area across from the Perrysburg Way Library. At this stop, Richard Baranowski made a presentation about Pretty Boy Floyd and his escapades on the Dixie Highway and his robing of banks in the area (Barsanowski, 2014a and 2014b). There was also a car show in the evening to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in cooperation with the O-Deer Diner in the Perrysburg area. Jeannine Wilbarger was the organizer at the Rossford public library. The speaker at the library was Judy Sikorski.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was not only to celebrate the Dixie Highway but to begin to better understand the culture through the interaction with individuals in Northwest Ohio. Information was collected before, during, and after the festival. These interviews were the focus of this manuscript. It is these types of celebrations where new information and new perspective is obtained.

### **Perspective**

The history of the development of the entire Dixie Highway system is well documented. (History, Web) This manuscript examines the culture that has developed on the Dixie Highway in Northwest Ohio. The type of information will give perspective about how these highways should be developed in the future (Sculle, 1994). The focus is not on the commercial or private transportation but upon the tourism. There is little doubt about the impact of the Dixie Highway on commercial and industrial development, but it also opened tourist trade between north and

south. The reason for the name of the Dixie Highway was that the Civil War was in the recent past and this represented a bridge between these two areas. The other dimension that is often discussed concerns the tourism moving from north to south through the Dixie Highway corridor. There was also movement from south to north and provided the cultural bridge of greater understanding through the tourist interaction. Even though tourism was not a primary emphasis during the initial development of the Dixie Highway, it was certainly an outgrowth of the development of the highway that had extensive economic impact.

The story of this particular research effort first began when one of the authors asked one of the NASCAR historians why NASCAR race tracks were placed where they were. It was a simple answer in that the tracks were located on US 1, which is one of the major north-south transportation corridors. There were secondary impacts to such a transportation system (Bennett, 2000). The secondary development that occurred involved such aspects as gas stations, hotels, and restaurants to serve the visitors on the highways. Roadside attractions to entertain visitors also emerged (De Lyser, 1999; Caton *et al.*, 2007). One of the most famous highways that represent this type of development is Route 66. This Highway still is an economic boom because of its popularity. In fact, new approaches are being used to continue the tourist aspect of the Route 66 to attract new customers and clients (Hurt, *et al.*, 2012; Henry, 1997). Many other highways have as much history as Route 66, but their histories have been forgotten. Their contribution to the cultural and heritage of the past as a foundation to the communities along these highways have also been neglected (Carden, 2006). In fact, the current interstate system has a foundation and is built on much of this culture and heritage. Indeed, the interstate system has mirrored the general location of many of these ignored highways.

### **Context**

When you travel the Dixie Highway, the history is apparent because the names of many of the businesses and general directional locations have the name Dixie somewhere in their title. The heritage of this particular Highway has been woven into

the community but many do not even understand its importance. When Interstate 75 was completed, it overshadowed the Dixie Highway. Today, the Dixie Highway in northwest Ohio has been forgotten and is only used as a part of everyday life from point A to point B. Although the highway is quite scenery, it has very little cultural meaning.

Two other important highways that are part of this story are the Lincoln Highway and the Grand Army of the Republic Highway. The Dixie Highway and the Grand Army of the Republic Highway intersect just south of Bowling Green. The uniqueness of this stretch of highway under consideration is that it is four-lane and was updated and as a result has many new developments as a result of its four-lane access. Another interesting Highway that is four-lane is US Highway 1 from Washington to Richmond Virginia (Dean, 2007). This is a four-lane Highway that can be contrasted with the stretch of the Dixie Highway from Perrysburg, Ohio to North Baltimore, Ohio. This stretch of US Highway 1, even with its four-lane, has had very little development because of Interstate 95.

It is important to recognize the differences between these two stretch of highways. Of course, the US Highway 1 is much longer, but it should have more importance because of the population centers of Washington, DC and Richmond Virginia. This is not true. It is a desolate stretch of highway where only the remnants of this once glorious highway can be found (Fajardo, 2003). One of the primary focuses of this manuscript concerns the future of these highways, using the stretch of the Dixie Highway in Ohio as a case study.

Not much thought has been given to the master planning of these highways and their redevelopment and the possibility of increased tourism (Mill, 2014). Not all travelers are interested in high speed but are interested in an adventure and recapturing the past using the old highways. These highways may offer renewed economic development for the small towns and cities along these transportation routes (Henry, 1997). These roadways were once thriving and can be again because they have the uniqueness of heritage, as well as high adventure. The primary question is one of infrastructure and the improvement of these highways to allow comfortable travel without enduring traffic problems (Proverbs, 2015). Some of these highways can

be four-lanes and some three lanes to allow access without traffic jams. If the highways are refurbished and infrastructure is developed, especially attractions that are related to the history and heritage of the highway, it will attract new tourists. These highways should be thought of as linear parks that provide a view into the past and a new opportunity for new attractions and tourists (Hughes, 1992). This type of travel represents a slower pace of life and a better quality of experience based upon greater understanding of our Highway heritage (Ed Lyser, 1999). Linear parks have been successful in the use of abandon railroad beds and developing them into hiking and biking trails. The C & O barge canal is an example of one of these linear parks that connects inner-city Washington to the suburbs.

It is important to understand that each of the communities along older but unique highways must have a common goal and participate fully in the redevelopment of these highways. Historical societies and the community fathers must be on the same page and willing to work with other communities along the highway to develop consistent themes and attractions (Fleming, 2013; Stoycoff, 2013).

Theming is one important key to the development of cottage industries with a consistent and sustainable business base (Fajardo, 2003; Payne, 20015). This undoubtedly is a major undertaking, but places where this has been done such as Skyline Drive, and the Blue Ridge Parkway, or in Virginia with the connector of Jamestown, Yorktown, and Williamsburg has been very successful. Each of these highways, along selected stretches have very unique histories and these unique histories have been developed into destination tourism attractions.

It must not be overlooked that the local community must understand their heritage first if such highways are to be developed. The schools of communities along this routes must build into their curricula information about the heritage of the community and the highways (Jalde and Sculle, 2011; Patrick, 2006). The citizens must also be educated to the community heritage, especially as it relates to the highways. The community must also be willing to cooperate with other like communities along the highway to develop consistent themes, as well as creating cooperative marketing programs (Carden, 2006). Any program must begin on the community level and be well



accepted by all stakeholders. An example of this type of development is the Amish area along Route 20 in Indiana. Wars, love affairs, and life have been lived on these highways and it is the understanding of this culture that will form the base for redevelopment of these historic byways (Kibby, 2000). It is recognized that the length of the highway cannot be developed as with Route 66, but unique sections can be developed that have a special historic perspective (Fajardo, 2003).

Another aspect of this redevelopment is that with the opening of better access, new commercial development will be established (Preston, 1991). It is important at this point to recognize that the commercial development along the highway is also an important part of the story, and can be incorporated into the tourist attraction through an industrial tourism approach (Shepard, 2013). Because of this factor, industry must also be on board and willing to participate because the location along the highway and in communities is a special part of the highway story. Many times related industries are the key to understanding the uniqueness of many of these areas whether it is agriculture, coal, etc.

### **Case Study Methology**

The method used in this study involved a Discourse analysis. This is an approach that investigates narratives and open discourse to determine meaning and importance (Bartram, 2003; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2010; Hood, 2016; Rose, 2007). The social indicators are film, commercial architecture, educational displays, etc. These indicators are used to examine the nature of these expressions and a context to help understand the values that are related to decisions related to landscape, place, culture, etc.

There were five data or information sets used: current local architecture, library sources, car clubs, cruise in participants, and local community stories. Each data set was analyzed to identify themes. Once themes were identified they were cross tabbed to detect common themes. Each theme magnitude was determined based upon the frequency of its appearance. These were expressed in terms of percentage and these percentages indicated the relative importance of the themes to each data set

as well is the aggregate data set. A 60% criterion was used as the significant threshold to identify a significant trend.

### **Data**

The data were divided into five categories: previous history, current commercial architecture, libraries, car clubs, participants of car cruise in, and community. The previous history is an overview of the major events up through the development of the interstate system, especially Interstate 75. It must be remembered that the history provided is not detailed, but provides the frame to view the context of other events. The current architecture is the current status of the Dixie Highway from Perrysburg to North Baltimore. This will give an indication about the current development, especially as it relates to future development. The libraries, car clubs, or disciplines of the cruise in, and the community will give some perspective about the culture of the Dixie Highway past, present, and future.

### **Perspective**

Before the in-depth case study was developed, it was important to understand the nature of the Dixie Highway. Buettner, Web and Ecker (Web) noted that in its original form, there was a bifurcation with one section being in Indiana and the other section in Ohio. This Highway historically transversed the north to south passageway from the Midwest to Florida. In these earlier times, this route was perceived as a cultural and innovative route that provided great mobility through the newfound adventure of travel. Up to this point in time, travel had been primarily a luxury of the leisure class. With the development of these highways and the automobile, the middle and lower class could now enjoy vacations and leisure travel that had been exclusively for the wealthy. This was a very romantic period. There were songs written about the Dixie Highway and adventure books detailing the exploits of travelers.

Different regions of the country celebrate the heritage of the Dixie Highway in a variety of ways. Michigan and Ohio celebrate much less than Indiana and states to the south from Kentucky to Florida. The southern states especially have a better understanding of the Dixie Highway and the impact that has had upon the culture. There are several Facebook pages which give

insight into the perspective about the feelings of the current residence about the highway. Ryan also has a website site dealing with the historic aspect of the Highway. Many of the southern individuals have a sense of place and purpose. There is a small element of nostalgia but this is related to the activities currently along the Dixie Highway. There is an effort to revitalize some of the stretches of the Highway, but it does not have anything to do with new tourism development but only ancillary commercial opportunities related to neighborhoods.

The beginning of the Dixie Highway was initiated by Carl Fischer and W. S Galbreath of the Hoosier Motor Club about 1910 (Buettner; Ecker). These individuals were part of the Dixie Highway Association which was responsible for planning the Dixie Highway. The structure was modeled after the Lincoln Highway Association. This was the first highway to link north and south. The planning process was similar to that of the Lincoln Highway. The highway was named for the 50 years of peace between north and south.

Promoters of the Dixie Highway in Ohio were from various cities such as Lima, Findlay, Piqua, Bowling Green, etc. Many of these cities represented the Main Market Route Number Seven which was already an established travel corridor door. Ultimately, the decision was made to locate the Dixie Highway in or near County seats.

The origins of the Dixie Highway have their beginnings in individuals trying to develop a transportation route through the great black swamp of Northwest Ohio. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a concerted effort to improve the roads for vehicles for commerce and tourism. There is a continuous effort to improve transportation, especially as it relates to the economy. The interstate system was the fulfillment of these initial efforts to improve the highway system. This period ended in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

There has been an evolution of infrastructural services along highways since their inception. In the beginning, food, lodging, gas, and repair shops were the essential services. Roadside entertainment developed as a secondary dimension. Cities and communities flourished as a result of the highways. The primary focuses of these localities were to increase business and prosper from not only the traveler but the commerce and

business associated with these highways. As the sophistication of the traveler and commerce and industry increased the infrastructure evolved to serve the needs of the travel and the community.

### **Influences**

It is important to recognize that the desire to travel was sparked by technology and the automobile. Mass transit to this point in time was the primary a means of travel. The automobile and the highways gave rise to personal travel and a desire to be mobile and express a high degree of independence in personal choice. The League of American Wheelmen, tourist organizations, and automobile manufacturers sought to improve and develop roads. Commercial interests sought also to improve transportation. The Grange and RFT delivery was also in favor of greater mobility for the rural areas. As a result of these types of pressures, there was an ever increasing demand for better transportation and this corresponded with the improvement of technology for a desire for the general population for long distance travel. It must be realized that there were great commercial interest driving the improvement in roads in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were also demands by investors in the travel business. An example would be Fisher, one of the founders of the Dixie Highway, want to invest in Florida because he can see the potential in the travel and tourism business. This was also the period of time of the great hotels and resorts. Even though this was for the wealthy class, the middle class, with the development of the automobile, could see the value in travel and tourism. The wealthy had their hotels and resorts but the common person could travel and stay at the hotel's and camps along the roadside and enjoy the same independence as the wealthy.

The American Automobile Association was one of the driving forces to the development of the road system through the American Road Congress. Fisher and Gilbreath were individuals who helped community leaders and politicians understand the potential of a north-south highway. Most of the arguments were quite pervasive because of the economic issues associated with these highways, especially a north-south corridor. Southern politicians could understand the nature of the development and

economic boom it would bring. The commitments to develop these highways were to transition the roads from gravel to hard pavement. This dream began in 1914 and by the early 1920's most of the roads were paved and in full operation. This was a very quick transition driven by the dreams of economic prosperity.

### **Businesses**

Some of the businesses generated from northern destinations were hunting, fishing, boating and other water activities on the Great Lakes (Buettner, Web and Ecker, Web). There were also some businesses related to snow sports in the winter. Southern destinations were directly related to the warm weather, especially during the winter months.

Businesses were generated along the roadside in bridge states that included services such as restaurants, hotels, gas stations, repair garages, auto parts stores, etc. These were the base infrastructural services necessary to support interstate travel.

Other businesses that were taken to the roadside were farm products, blankets, crafts, farm products, pottery etc. Some of these roadside businesses developed into regional commerce. These have formed the basis of many cottage industries which have developed into themed businesses. One example is Route 20 in Indiana where there have been cottage industries developed around an Amish theme. This has developed into a very lucrative tourism industry. The other aspect is a development of roadside attractions to get tourists to stop and spend their money on unique ventures.

Historically, southern Ohio was well populated while the northern part of Ohio had smaller settlements. There were Native American paths through the Black Swamp, but movement of people and goods very much prohibited the settlement of this area. When the Black Swamp was drained, this provided the basis for the development of a stable transportation path across Northwest Ohio. During the war of 1812, it was necessary to move material and troops across the Black Swamp. This path was known as Hall's Trace. This transportation route mirrored the Dixie Highway as it was developed. Later, this route was transformed into what was termed the Findlay-Perrysburg Mud

Pike. This was converted to a plank road and was a toll road. This road was not well maintained and was a constant source of problems. When the swamps were drained, the roads were still not negotiable. When oil and gas were discovered in Wood County, there were many boom towns in Northwest Ohio. This was also the beginning of the glass industry with the sand and natural gas. At the turn turn-of-the-century, because of the prosperity, the road was developed into a mechanized or stone road which vastly improved its negotiability.

### **Wood County**

In June, 1915, the Dixie Highway Association met in Wood County and local residents strongly advocated the designation of the Findlay-Perrysburg Turnpike as a segment of the Dixie Highway (Buettner, Web and Ecker, Web). There was a great understanding that this would bring commerce and tourists. Once the Dixie Highway was completed from Toledo to Dayton, there was unprecedented prosperity in all of the communities where the highway was located. By 1927, the whole length of the Dixie Highway had been paved, improving its negotiability and further increasing traffic and commerce.

Improvements in the road and services continued through the 1960's, when the parallel Interstate 75 was completed. There were numerous gas stations, restaurants, auto repair, and traveler camps. Most of the businesses on the Dixie Highway closed and services shifted to Interstate 75. The Dixie Highway from Perrysburg to Cygnet is still used as an access road, especially between Perrysburg and Bowling Green.

There are still many remnants of the services from the golden era of the Dixie Highway. As an example, the current location of Arby's replaced one of the hotels in Bowling Green and the Dixie Motel in Perrysburg was just torn down in 2014. There still are two motels one just south of Bowling Green. Its name is Best Motel and the other north of Bowling Green and its name is Affordable Motel. The gas station and motel where Bugsy Siegel had a home base for his the various activities on Dixie Highway is still there. Many businesses retain the name Dixie Highway such as Dixie Auto Parts, Dixie Muffler, Dixie Driving Range, North Dixie Auto, Dixie Electric Company, etc. The gravel quarry where the stone was excavated is still there

and used as a recreational area for swimming. Another interesting note is that when digging along the Dixie Highway workmen found planks that are very well preserved. This is a result of the heavy clay which has preserved the planks.

The landscape of the Dixie Highway began to change significantly in the 1990's, with extensive residential development from Perrysburg, south toward Bowling Green. In 2000, heavy commercial development began at the intersection of Dixie Highway and Route 23. A shopping center was developed called Levis Common. This started a developmental boom at this intersection in Perrysburg and has proceeded south toward Bowling Green. This includes medical facilities and many commercial types of development. It must also be noted that several landmarks from the golden era of the Dixie Highway has given way to this development. This development continues toward Bowling Green and includes churches, nursing homes, recreational facilities, housing, etc.

The development of Bowling Green toward Perrysburg is similar except the development is not as vigorous. There is a commercial zone north of Bowling Green toward Perrysburg. The development in this area has been random and includes churches, restaurants, etc. The north component of the development is an industrial park and there are many car dealerships along with the industrial development. The Woodland Mall was also developed, but it has not been a success. At its beginning, there was very vigorous activities in the out parcels such as banks, strip malls, etc. but this is slowed with the downturn of business at the Woodland Mall. There is also some industrial development, especially at Route 586 that has direct access to I 75. There is water treatment, trucking concerns, industrial plastic plant, etc. along this access pathway. The direct result of this development is because of easy access to I 75 and less congestion.

It must be noted that this development has increased real estate value significantly along the stretch of road from Bowling Green to Perrysburg. This increase in development and land value is not directly related only to 75 but due to the viability of the four-lane and access to the major population centers in and around Toledo. The development is not only north and south but also east and west. The traditional farmland that was

characteristic of the Golden age of the Dixie Highway is being lost to some extent.

The development south of Bowling Green toward Portage is also very vigorous. Most of this development has been of a commercial and some of an industrial nature. Access to Route 6, which is the historical roots of the Grand Army of the Republic, is the reason for some of this development. This route is a very well-traveled east-west route parallel to the Ohio Turnpike. It also provides access west from the four-lane Route 24, which is four-lane to Fort Wayne and Interstate 96. This is a bridge route from I 75 West. Route 6 to the East provides access to the Ohio Turnpike, as well as Routes 2 and 6 to Cleveland. Some development has occurred east and west along Route 6 around Bowling Green.

The development from Portage to Cygnet has been very little. Route 25/ Dixie Highway ends at Cygnet because the traditional Route 25/Dixie Highway at this point becomes part of I-75. The exception to this is Ingleside Road which is a traditional roadway that has an original bridge from the Dixie Highway period. This Ingleside Road ends at North Baltimore.

The Dixie Highway that is part of the study as mentioned before is from Perrysburg to Cygnet/North Baltimore. The past history of this section of road has been reviewed and the current state of the highway also has been reviewed. It is apparent that the development of the current Dixie Highway has been a random function. What is being recommended, from this manuscript, is that historical highways like the Dixie Highway need to be reinvigorated or redeveloped to resurrect the viability of these routes. A master plan needs to be developed for these projects. The obvious model is that of the Route 66, which is in the process of being revitalized. It must be remembered that this highway already has a stellar reputation and the revitalization will be successful without much effort. Another model is that of Williamsburg, Virginia. If successful tourism destinations are studied, it is found that those that are themed are more successful. Each of these historic highways has a unique perspective and it is important to understand that perspective and develop a theme around their uniqueness.

It is obvious from history that this Dixie Highway project has a Black Swamp theme that extends from Native American times



through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The theme is one of location and the convenience of this location to other areas and how this location relates to current transportation hubs and historically how it relates to the past. This location is convenient to Detroit, Toronto, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Chicago, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Buffalo, etc. It is a central distribution location and this is very consistent from Native American times to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Black Swamp is a very important part of the story.

It is not being suggested that this is the only theme possibility, but it is a theme planners should look at very closely because of the uniqueness of this area. It must be recognized for a theme to be successful; it must be well accepted by cooperating communities, business interest, industries, the general population, volunteer organization, and all community members. The theme and the attractions must be developed and staged in such a sequence that these attractions and themes can be tested to determine their effectiveness. Once these themes have been tested with various audiences, investments can be made in the attractions first and then in the infrastructure. This was the model that was used in Branson, Missouri. The attractions were developed and the necessary infrastructure to support these attractions.

It must be recognized that all interests not only accepts the cooperation, but can tell their stories in an effective manner and open their doors to tourists. The first group that should be attracted is the mass tourists that include bus groups because the attractions can be tested and adjusted before the general tourist attractions are engaged. It must also be recognized that this is not a bridge attraction but one of a destination that includes enough activities for several days. It must also be structured in such a way that new experiences are available for different visits. Master planning, in this context, is a process. Many master planning projects use a content approach. This is not a static process, but a dynamic one and must continue to evolve as the project develops. The focus is upon the operations and the continued evaluation of these operations.

The nature of the Black Swamp story, in terms of the Dixie Highway, must be told in terms of the everyday people and the impacts that it has upon the individual. (Knapp, 2015) The times and cultures of old must be explained in the context of meaning

and relevance to the individual and the time to help the people of today understand their struggles and journeys through life. Each community must have a part of the story and it must be well integrated so that the context makes a complete educational package. The nature of this type of program is based upon experiential education. The learner has to be actively involved with hands-on experiences to complete the education cycle. Involvement, in this context, is not a passive but an active experience.

### **Culture**

The cultural section of this article is based upon interactions with librarians, car clubs, cruise in guests, and the community (How people relate to Dixie Highway, Web). The first observation from the discourses is obviously the importance of the Dixie Highway in relation to the black swamp. This fact is very apparent from the historical analysis and the current commercial architecture analysis. The central location of the Dixie Highway in this part of the United States also emphasized its cultural heritage. The culture is a reflection of its location. It is currently a crossroads between north and south and east and west. This was true in the past and is true in the present and will be even more important in the future.

In addition, to the discourse theme of location identified in the historic and current commercial architecture there were three other themes identified: pride, community identity, and arrogance.

An individualistic perspective developed in the regional culture because of the difficult life during the black swamp era. This perspective has been pervasive throughout the years and is still very prevalent in the residence of the community. Individuals in the community accomplish objectives and do not let any obstacle stand in their way of achievement. This achievement is in terms of business, community development, etc. The agricultural heritage is a companion that has been a companion of this pride because of directly working with resource products and the amount of production that is achieved. There is a great satisfaction in planning the crops and watching their growth and knowing that they are one of the bread baskets of the United States as well as the world. As a result of the location to Detroit,

the auto supply business has flourished in the area as well as the glass industry. The schools and community resources provide for a good place to live and a quality of life.

The discourse theme of community identity is predicated upon the foundation of the elements associated with the pride. Individuals have realized that the individuals had to get along cooperate to achieve common goals. Most citizens have an innate responsibility and understand that their contribution makes for a stronger community. This translates to a very active citizens involved in most decision processes. New residents are welcome and diversity is the basis of new community development. The citizens are welcomed into the community and their active participation is encouraged. Another source of identity is a place of employment. There's a strong tradition with employment and the recognition of a quality product and the contribution that each makes. This is the foundational element that builds confidence. As stated in section 1 of the discourse self-identity is directly related to pride. This self-confidence gives rise to a collective development of success based upon identity. This is a never die attitude that allows for the community to succeed with the ups and downs of the economy or other bad situations. The individual and the community know that they have the innate ability to succeed.

Some of the key discourse words were individuality, uniqueness, character, personality, and distinctiveness. These elements can best be summed up as an element associated with success that comes from the inside. These characteristics are typical Midwest values. These are words that characterize the individuals from this area from the history of the black swamp era through the Dixie Highway to the present and will continue in the future. These individuals were a hearty lot and their characteristics and tenacity is what is built this particular region and is very characteristic of this stretch of Highway and its use.

For thematic elements of the discourse are location, pride, and all community involvement, and the characteristics of the individual that make up the communities around the Dixie Highway from Perrysburg to North Baltimore.

## Conclusion

There are opportunities in communities that have an active relationship with historic highways. If a master planning process is applied, they have the potential to develop effective tourism attractions that will bring tourists to the community. If the community is actively involved, this type of project can be from bottom-up and help the community understand the nature of its past and be used as a tool to help the community revitalize itself. The Golden Age of the highways is still viable if the infrastructure and tourist programs can be integrated. This is a daunting task and directly depends upon the community to be actively involved. It is the key to success and if the community is not involved and willing to cooperate with other communities in terms of a linear park concept, then the project is doomed to failure. Those projects that have a total community commitment, with an effective unique theme, have had some very successful projects.

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## Additional Resources

### *History*

<http://www.in.gov/history/markers/4119.htm>

### *Content/ Dixie Highway*

Buettner, Michael G. *IN SEARCH OF . . . THE DIXIE HIGHWAY IN OHIO*.

<http://www.lincolnhighwayoh.com/v1/Dixie.html>

Ecker, Pam S. *The Historic Context of the Dixie Highway*. <http://www.us-highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm>

### *Historical Face book Site*

Rein, Russell Stephen. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DixieHwy/>

### *Relating to the Dixie Highway*

<http://photosilke.blogspot.com/2013/10/dixie-highway.html?view=mosaic>

[https://books.google.com/books?id=VkYQT\\_1pO4cC&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=http://www.us-](https://books.google.com/books?id=VkYQT_1pO4cC&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=http://www.us-highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm&source=bl&ots=9kas4ERCBz&sig=ZuT_2g)

[highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm&source=bl&ots=9kas4ERCBz&sig=ZuT\\_2g](https://books.google.com/books?id=VkYQT_1pO4cC&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=http://www.us-highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm&source=bl&ots=9kas4ERCBz&sig=ZuT_2g)

[DD4rm92w8pYg5mIQC0sJ4&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjO8P6k05TNAhX](https://books.google.com/books?id=VkYQT_1pO4cC&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=http://www.us-highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm&source=bl&ots=9kas4ERCBz&sig=ZuT_2g)

[M34MKHXBABiIQ6AEIJjAC#v=onepage&q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.us-](https://books.google.com/books?id=VkYQT_1pO4cC&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=http://www.us-highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm&source=bl&ots=9kas4ERCBz&sig=ZuT_2g)

[highways.com%2Ftzimm%2Fecker.htm&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=VkYQT_1pO4cC&pg=PA131&lpg=PA131&dq=http://www.us-highways.com/tzimm/ecker.htm&source=bl&ots=9kas4ERCBz&sig=ZuT_2g)

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Dixie-Highway/112573912091807>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/iamdixiehighway/>

# The Evolution of Films about Cars

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## **Abstract**

*While much of the historical perspective of the automobile has been lost, some has been saved in films and documentaries. This work examines a number of car films and documentaries as a way to get at a better understanding of how the role of the automobile in society has changed and continues to change.*

## **Introduction**

The automobile has had a significant impact upon society. Movies and documentaries have chronicled this development. (Automobiles, in this context, are all vehicles such as cars, trucks, motorcycles, etc.) It is important to recognize that the automobile's position in society has changed since its invention and development. Much of the historical perspective of the automobile has been lost, but some has been saved in films and documentaries. By examining these materials, it is possible to get a sense of the past and its possible role in the future as the technology has changed. The real question is: has its position become more relevant or meaningful with this increase in technology? The position and role of the automobile in societies is changing and this change is being reflected in the movies and documentaries.

An article by Hey (1976) identifies three stages of the changing culture of the automobile. The first stage was an historical transitional period between the old lifestyle and the new progressive lifestyle of the automobile. This is the phase in which

there is a contrasting lifestyle between preindustrial and industrial mores and values. The second stage has been the idolization of the car because it has transformed lifestyle to one that represents a great mobility and independence. The automobile, during this period, helped to redefine the self-image. The third phase has been the reality of both the negative and positive impacts of the car upon society. It represents an anti-humanistic perspective. The machine overshadows the individual. The automobile has assumed the personal nature of the individual relating to conflicts, desires, etc. It represents all-consuming element that controls the lifestyle. There have been other articles (Other than Hey), but this one seems to have the greatest content validity. The three stage typology is valid through the mid-1970s.

The two significant events that popularized the automobile were World War I and World War II (Frohart-Lane, 2012; Volti, 2004). After World War I, the automobile became a function part of the society. After World War II, the car was romanticized and became a fantasy in terms of its design and function. The 70's and 80's brought a realization of the reality of the automobile and its impact, especially upon the environment (Eyeman and Lofgren, 1995; Hewer and Bowerlie, 2007; Volti, 2004). It is recognized that each of the three stages are still very viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The practicality and the emotions are still very prevalent. The society is trying to find an alternative to the pollution of the automobile to reduce its carbon footprint. In addition, there is a period where technology is significantly modifying the automobile. Technology, includes and autonomous cars, alternative fuels, etc., and this will change the way the individual interfaces with the car ( PR Newswire, 2015).

The problem with the three stages of consciousness is in stage II. This is a very complicated stage that involves the different genres of the car movement. Each of the genres has a particular passion about the vehicles in which they are associated. Stage II in the Hey's typology, did not allow for these variations and differences. These differences are not easily categorized and have a tremendous difference in behavioral responses. It is essential that this Stage II be expanded to incorporate a very complete understanding of the car movement.



Stage III also has problems because it does not recognize the full impact of cars related to transportation (Ryan, 2013; Dahl, 2005). There are both positive and negative aspects and the Hey's article primarily focuses upon the negative. The positives will far outweigh the negative if technology can develop a vehicle that has less of a carbon foot print and has a better safety record.

A fourth stage must be added that is based upon the development of new technology that will make cars and trucks more efficient and better able to serve the needs of society. It is essential that the new technologies be adopted by the population. The same problems that occurred in stage I will also occur in this new Stage IV. The population will be very reluctant to change their behavior patterns with this new technology in the vehicles. The new technology gives the operator less control and the machine more control. Much of the romantic phenomena are the relationship between the operator and the machine. It is the ability of the operator to control the machine that gives it importance. This control is essential to developing a passion about the vehicle. The passion with the vehicle also comes with the aesthetic designs and art associated with the vehicle (Hower and Bowerlie, 2007; Gunnell and Sieber, 1992; Loveland *et al.*, 2010). The new technology may be presented in a package similar to the old designs, but it will have a new relationship to the consumer in terms of operation as well as the feelings it invokes (Redshaw, 2006; Sheller, 2004). New meanings will be added to the relationship with the vehicles, but the transition period related to the past and the romance will be very difficult to overcome.

Film is a chronicle of the four stages of the historical progression of the society's attitudes about the automobile (Newland, 2009; Treacey, 2000; Volti, 2004). All of the stages are represented during all historical periods. Some are more prevalent during different time periods than others. It is the popularity of the films during a period that gives it importance. This is a reflection of the attitudes toward the automobile. The primary element is the impact and the influence of certain films upon society. These films, because of their impact, influence the thought about the position of the automobile during a period of time (Weinbrenner, 2011; Vankin and Whalen, 2005).

## Methodology

The purpose of this manuscript was to chronicle car movies and their popularity, and to identify thematic trends. All data was analyzed by three content experts on auto movies.

Generalizations had to be made by two of the three experts to be incorporated into the paper. Data was collected through 2015.

In order to obtain what car movies that are popular, car film sources were reviewed. The car magazines reviewed were: DuckSoftware, Hot Rod, Telegraph, BuzzFeed, MotorGeek forum, Speedway Media, Screen Junkies, MovieFone, Answers.com, and Complex. In Table 1, each film is listed with its title and year. The distributor of the film is listed along with whether there has been a criterion review of the movie. Also listed are the sources that have found this movie to be one of its top picks. The greater the number of sources that have this movie at the top of the list, the more important is its popularity to the car movement. Several films were identified by the content experts and added to the list. These non-reference films were added because of their importance to the car movement.

In addition to the sources reviewed, the primary research site was IMDb. This is a site that has a comprehensive review of each movie and lists its credits, as well as its rating from movie reviewers that are part of the general population. It must be recognized that the reviews are skewed and provide an insight to the quality of the film, but it is not representative of all movie viewers. The IMDb website is where the reviewer can find detailed information about the movie. This site was used as another data point. The average score for each film, by random reviewers, was also reported. This gave a second data point and helps obtain perspective about each film. These mean scores were from movie reviewer ratings. It must be noted that the rating numbers, in terms of sample, vary widely.

In addition to the movies that have been reviewed by the movie sources, there is also a list of car movies that have very little reference. These movies are especially important to those of a specific genre. It must be recognized that the movies in the table or index are not comprehensive, but are representative of the types of movies that may appear in the genre. The lists of movies that are in the non-reference section and the genre have

been obtained through interactions with car clubs and individuals at car shows. This is an informal survey and does not represent a random or a representative sample. It must be noted, at this point, that some individuals just like car movies in general, and others are drawn to specific types of movies.

## Results

The focus of the analysis is upon Stages III and IV. The reason for this is that the influence of different genre is the only way to view romance with the automobile. Each genre has a different perception, even though the love of their particular automobile is the basic value. It is also essential in Stage IV, to begin to understand the influence of the new technology and its impact.

A list of movies was obtained from sources that list the most popular movies. Each of these movies was researched in the IMDb database. Each movie was identified with its date of production, websites that reference the movie, user and critics ratings, and the brief summary of the theme of the movie.

Content experts placed these movies into different genre. It is recognized that most of these movies can be placed in more than one genre. Those movies that have the highest rating are the most popular and have the greatest influence. Popularity, in this context, is two categories: the general population and the genre. There are some movies across both of these categories. These are the movies that have the greatest impact.

The focus of this manuscript is to characterize these genre movies to describe and understand the relationship between these movies, especially as they relate to Stages III and IV in the Hey's model. This will give greater understanding of how the automobile has had an influence upon society and will give an indication of how the future may relate to the growing technology.

It must be remembered that each type of car represents different genre. The different movies associated with each genre can be identified through the following website: <http://www.imcdb.org/>. Each of these different car types that are represented by a genre in the movies can be researched. There are variations among these genres. The analysis of these different genres is beyond the scope of this manuscript.

The purpose of this manuscript is to identify general themes of movies in association with Stages III and IV, and the nature of the stories. It is also recognized that only the movies that have a greater popularity will give the best overview. The movies identified from the list of sources of popular movies for cars and movies that have been identified from the content experts and car clubs are listed. The movies with a mean rating of 7.5 or above in the IMDb database are the ones that will be initially identified for analysis. In addition to the scores, the number of reviewers is extremely important because the mean may be spurious. There are two general categories of movies: one that has general popularity and the one that is associated with a particular car movement. Those movies with higher user rating numbers are the ones that have the greater general popularity and those that have the smaller user rating numbers are the ones that are specifically related to a particular car movement.

The following is a list of movies with their rating and the sample size of the user rating.

- *American Graffiti* (1973)/mean 7.5/user number rating 60,000+
- *Blues Brothers* (1980)/mean 7.9/user number rating 134,000+
- *Bullitt* (1968)/mean 7.5/user number rating 43,000+
- *Drive* (2011)/mean 7.8/user number rating 414,000+
- *Duel* (1971)/mean 7.7/user number rating 43,000+
- *Dust to Glory* (2005)/mean 7.5/user number rating 822
- *French Connection* (1971)/mean 7.8/user number rating 76,000+
- *Get Carter* (1971)/mean 7.5/user numbers rating 20,000+
- *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963)/mean 7.6/ user number rating 27,000+
- *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)/mean 7.8/user number rating 59,000+
- *Road Warrior* (1981)/mean 7.6/user number rating 124,000+
- *Rush* (2013)/mean 8.2/user number rating 278,000+
- *Senna* (2010)/mean 8.6/user number rating 43,000+

- *Taxi Driver* (1976)/mean 8.4/user number rating 464,000+
- *Truth in 24* (2008)/mean 8.5/user rating 311
- *Truth in 24 II* (2012)/mean 7.5/user rating 185
- *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005)/mean 7.9/user number rating 42,000+
- *Yank Tanks* (2002)/mean 8.0/user number rating 70

Of the films that are listed, there is a continuum. At left end are the movies: *Bullitt* (1968), *Drive* (2011), *Get Carter* (1971), *Goldfinger* (1964), *The French Connection* (1971), and *Taxi Driver* (1976). These movies are based upon adventure and excitement that deal with crime. In the left middle of the continuum are: *American Graffiti* (1973), *Blues Brothers* (1980), *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), and *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* (1987). These represent films that have a popular perspective about the society and its cultural affiliation with the automobile. The right center position is the movies: *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Road Warrior* (1981). These movies are specifically related to vehicles and to the rebellious nature of a culture. At the right end of the continuum are movies that focus strictly upon cars. *Rush* (2013) and *Senna* (2010) are two of these types of movies.

A movie from each of the sections was selected for further analysis: *Bullitt* (1968), *American Graffiti* (1973), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *Rush* (2013).

*Bullitt* (1968) was selected to represent the general population movies that are based upon adventure and excitement. The user ratings were primarily male: 34,000+ were males and 2000+ were females. The distribution of age indicates that this film is most popular with the 30 to 44 age group. There were 309 user reviews and 93 critic reviews. The primary tagline was: There are bad cops and there are good cops and then there is Bullet. This film is a classic mystery with outstanding car scenes. The realism in the movie sells the story. The story also represents a street culture that is very desirable in regard to the action scenes involving car chases. The car chases stand alone and are one of the primary reasons that car enthusiasts like this particular movie. The car scenes overshadowed the story for car enthusiasts. Speed and the ability to see what a car can do is the

essence of the car movement. This type of hero is very closely associated with the fantasy of being able to do unbelievable stunts with cars. There is a controversy of whether the car or the driver is the star in relation to car enthusiast.

*American Graffiti* (1973) was selected from the right middle continuum because it has the greatest content related to the car movement. In the IMDb database, there is more detailed information. This data was reviewed to characterize the movies that are being reviewed on the continuum. The primary data sources used for this review were the demographics for the user ratings, comments from user reviewers and critics, key work plot, taglines, etc. The user ratings were primarily male: 42,000+ were males and 7000+ were females. The age dispersal was fairly evenly distributed among the 18 to 45+. There were 235 user reviews and 100 critic reviews. The principal tagline was: where were you in 62? The primary nature of this movie demonstrates the acceptance of cruising. Even though the movie has a dated timeline, the popularity of cruising seems to relate to all age groups. It represents the desire to show off one's car as an extension of his/her persona. This can be seen throughout the years, in terms of the popularity of car shows, and the dedication of the car's collectors to talk about their vehicles in a very overt way. Nostalgia is the overriding theme and car enthusiasts relate to this nostalgia very well. Even though the overriding theme is teen culture, based on it illustrates the importance of the car to youth development. The car, in this context, represents a lost youth, independence, rebellion, etc.

*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) was selected because of the central role of the vehicle in the story. The vehicle, in this film, represented a very negative image. The vehicle was a motorcycle not a car. The primary user audience was male: 38,000+ males and 11,000+ females. The greatest in the age distribution of the user was 18 to 29 and 30 to 44. There were 280 user reviews and 136 critic reviews. The tagline was: A bad boy from a good family. The obvious theme of the film was rebellion. Within the story, this rebellion had a position of being a cool persona. This is and has become the perspective of the misunderstood teenager in society. The theme is acceptance from other teenagers and the development of their own culture. The obvious creed of the teen culture is friends keep their

promises to their friends. The vehicles in this movie became an expression and the symbol of the culture.

*Rush* (2013) is a movie about Formula One competition. The story is about competitors and their desire to win. This film has broad appeal because of the story and the relationships beyond the thrilling car scenes. The primary user audience was male: 215,000+ male and 31,000+ female. The film attracted the age 18 to 29 audience demographic. There was also a significant number in the 30 to 44 age group. The older 45+ age group had much fewer viewers. There were 471 user reviews and 389 critic reviews. The tagline was: Everyone is driven by something. The popularity of this film is the quality of the story along with the intense rivalry between competitors. Racing films often had heroes and it is the worship of these individuals that is the focus of the story. This is about the competition between individuals and what drives them. The thrills of the car scenes are overwhelming and add to the film, but they are not the primary focus.

It must be emphasized that the movies listed above are only examples of the continuum. It must also be emphasized that each car type has a passionate following and must be examined, but that's beyond the scope of this paper.

Several of the different genres of movies have been identified:

### *Trucks*

The Truck movies primarily focus on the truck culture. The truck culture can be divided into personal service trucks and commercial rigs. Most of the truck movies focus upon the truck and it is characterized as a lifestyle that is part of the subculture of cars and has its own distinct characteristics of living on the road. There are some movies that deal with the trucks as a means not an end in itself.

### *Elvis*

The Elvis movies are set in a racing culture, but the primary focus is on Elvis and his music. Racing, in this context, provides an endeavor that is designed to show his masculine characteristics. It is also designed to explore his adventure and

risk-taking persona. There is also a touch of rebelliousness within the story.

### *Street Racing*

Street racing movies are about one topic and that is speed and bragging rights of who has the fastest car. These stories are weaved in a setting many times of rebellious activities because the streets are not a proper venue for racing. These individuals seek reputation, at any cost, because they want to be “king of the hill”. This spans the muscle car era to the tuners of the youth cultural movement.

### *Action/Chase*

The Action/Chase movies are about adding adventure to the story. The chase scenes are auxiliary to the main storyline. They add an environment, or context, that gives the story action and thrills that intensify the need for excitement and adventure.

### *NASCAR Racing*

Most of the NASCAR movies are to present a NASCAR story culture in order to provide understanding about the sport. The primary focus of many of the movies is popularization of the sport. Most of the themes are set in a racing context and the impacts that it has upon the lives of the racers and their families.

### *Popular Culture*

The popular culture movies are to celebrate the everyday life and the manifestations of the car culture. They often explore the relationship between cultural indicators and the car. These stories are often told in the context of current trends and issues.

### *Hot Rods*

Hot Rod movies are often a mixture of speed and are very similar to street movies. There is an aspect of these movies of aesthetic appeal of the car and the way it appears. Looks, in this context, are as important as the speed. They are often an artwork on wheels. It is how the vehicle looks sitting still, as well as at high speed. The stories are often superimposed upon adventure and a approach to the personal life of hot rod owner.



### *Indy Racing*

The Indy racing movies are about open wheel racing. The stories often focus around the racing culture. It is more of a middle-class sport and has all the trappings of this type of culture. Racing is the center focus of the movie and offers an historical perspective on the sport. The tradition of this type of racing is often the backdrop of the story. It is the impact that speed has upon the individual and their family.

### *Land Speed*

Films about land speed are documenting the competition for achieving records regarding highest speed in various categories. These films are often factual and document the technology and struggles that are associated with this type of competition. Innovations in technology are the result of these efforts. The dedication to this effort is overwhelming and the individual stories about this dedication are the context of most of these films

### *Women*

Women in the sport of racing are documented through these films. The stories are often struggles about women trying to overcome the barriers in a male-dominated sport. The inspiration and encouragement of the film is to stimulate interest in the sport from a woman's perspective. It is also to inform about what it takes for a woman to be a champion in such a sport. Often, the stories are told from a family perspective.

### *Road Trips*

The road trip films are about adventures on the open road. The stories are often told in a comical format in which the audience can directly relate. Other films are about traveling on the road, rebellion of the traveler, and the invigorating feel of the open road to satisfy this need.

### *Romance*

In the romance films the primary focus is the story. The setting often revolves around cars, especially racing. The concern is primarily love and relationships. It is the interactions and the development of mood. The feelings generated are the

center of the story, whether they are good or bad. Often, these are feel-good movies that are directly related to life's experiences.

### *Formula One*

These movies are about the Formula One racing series. They are stories about the struggles of individuals involved and their relationships. The stakes in these movies are more intense because of the increased technology of the car and high speeds. There is intense competition from all over the world. Because this is the premier world racing series, pride and bragging rights are the overarching element that influences many of the plots.

### *Folk Art*

Folk art films explore the expressive nature of the aesthetics of the automobile. This artistic expression has themes that are personal and represent an individual's involvement with their vehicle in terms of their personal life. Their experiences with their vehicle influence the nature of their visual expressions.

### *Old Racing Movies*

These are racing movies that represent a past era. The storylines are similar to other racing movies where the topic is speed and the relationships of those involved. The themes have not changed, just the vehicles and the amount of speed.

### *Dark Side*

The Dark Side movies are focused upon the monstrous nature of the vehicle and its power to do evil. Many of these films have vehicles with supernatural powers and assumed the personality of an evil individual. They explore the nature of the vehicle, as well as their own.

### *Drifting*

Drifting movies explore a new form of racing. The focus is on the art of driving and the ability to be able to slide cars through curves and still maintain control. The concentration is on the younger generation and exploring the impact of this type of racing upon their culture. Many times the stories are very similar to street racing. The cars in the stories are important, but the

nature of the racing and its relationship to the youth culture is the important element.

### *Dirt/Small Track Racing*

These films are an exploration of the roots of racing. The short tracks are historically where most racing series began. It is the raw nature of these films that gives greater understanding to the historical perspective of racing. The themes of other racing movies are similar in that they tell the story of the racers' lives and families.

### *Drag Racing*

Drag racing films are about speed and its achievement within a quarter-mile distance. This form of racing had its beginnings as street racing, but has evolved into a high tech sport. It is different from street racing in that it is sanctioned and safety is an overriding element. Accidents and their impact is a theme of many of the stories. This includes the risking of their life for speed and why they do it.

### *Children's Car Movies*

Children's car movies are often about the humanizing of cars. Many of these films are animations. The focus is on the personality of the car and its relationship to its owners. Other themes develop the story around the personality of the car. Many times the human characteristics of these cars are emphasized. There is very little interaction with people, but the interaction is with other cars and the stories of competition, love, relationships, etc.

### **Conclusion**

Hey's (1976) article described the consciousness of the automobile from its inception. The focus of this article is to update the Hey model and to add another layer of thinking. The weakness in his model involved the later stages where there was acceptance and a romantic relationship of owners with their cars. This manuscript has shown that the various genres are quite diverse and complex. There is a continuum in film from where the cars are used to tell the story to where the car is the primary

center of the film. As you move through the continuum, there is a greater romance and involvement in its various forms with the automobile. The car has become a star and is as important an element as the actor and story. The one classification that has not been widely explored is the upcoming technology with the automobile. In the past, the stories have been man and his relationship with the car and his ability to influence its operation. The person, in this case, has complete control. As new technologies have developed with the automobile, the operator has less control and the drivability of the person is not as important. There have been very few films and documentaries that explore this aspect of the automobile. The primary place where this is explored in film is in fantasy and sci-fi movies. The reality of the technology is here and this is the new chapter in films about cars.

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## Blending Fact with Fiction: How Automobile Racing Movies Turn Sports News into Relationship Narrative

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores the collective dynamics of a narrative shift that occurs whenever motion pictures depicting actual events in automobile racing feel compelled to incorporate elements of a more humanistic or sociocultural nature. Feature films like *Grand Prix* (1966), *Winning* (1969), *LeMans* (1971), *The Last American Hero* (1973), *Days of Thunder* (1990), and *Talladega Nights: The Legend of Ricky Bobby* (2005) all used “real life” competition as the backdrop for their action-based content. These films, in their efforts to present a sense of realism, are compelled to blend factual events with the fictional narrative of the film’s plot.*

Maybe we can go back to 1913 and blame it all on Barney Oldfield. When Mack Sennett, the creative force behind Keystone Studios, wanted to tell a melodramatic love story using the *milieu* of professional automobile racing, he opted to include recognized racing car drivers from the era. It would have been too time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to stage a road race near his studios, so Sennett opted for the real thing. He took his motion picture camera to an event being run in Corona, California. All he needed to do was capture some of the sport’s biggest names on film for use in his tale of star-crossed lovers seeking romantic bliss amidst the smoke and danger of automobile racing.

Enter Barney Oldfield. Putting “America’s Speed King” before the camera was a quick way to validate the authenticity of Sennett’s melodramatic plot. Mabel Normand, the female protagonist of the silent short, had to do little else but approach

the hulking Fiat driven by Oldfield as the race car sat idling on the starting line. As Normand wished Oldfield good luck in that day's event, the nationally-famous driver only had to sit up straight behind the steering wheel, give a gentlemanly wave to the camera, and continue chewing the cigar butt held firmly between his teeth (for protection against the jarring experienced when combining hard suspensions at high speeds and rough roads).

Once Mabel Normand said goodbye to Barney Oldfield, the following scene showed the field of race cars roaring into action. The remainder of the short film blended actual race footage with staged scenes featuring Normand and Ford Sterling, another Keystone Studios regular who, in this film, portrayed Normand's domineering father who hopes his daughter will fall in love with Stutz driver Earl Cooper. Cooper's reputation as a racer was positive, as the driver behaved in a respectful and professional manner. Instead, Normand seeks passion and romance with "Terrible" Teddy Tetzlaff, a racing driver infamous for using-and-abusing cars in a "checkers-or-wreckers" approach to motorsports.

By the conclusion of *The Speed Kings*, Cooper rolls his Stutz into Victory Lane, Normand rides away with Tetzlaff in the popular "'good' girls go for 'bad' boys" style, and Oldfield maintains his bearing as the most recognized automobile racer in America. There is, however, another moral to the story, one reflecting much greater sociocultural importance: the recognition that automobile racing represents a microcosm of human achievement in both its heroic and tragic spheres.

The setting of *The Speed Kings* provides us with a good example of what is meant by this. This movie was filmed near Corona, California which was, in the early years of organized automobile racing competition, the location of several significant motorsports events. Corona featured a circular racetrack that surrounded the nucleus of the city center. As such, Corona was known as a fast and sometimes dangerous place to race.

In the 1913 race that served as the principal location of *The Speed Kings*, Earl Cooper won not only the 250-mile event as advertised by local officials, but he also averaged 74 miles-per-hour to take the "unlimited free-for-all" fifty-miler that followed. In that portion of the day's action, Barney Oldfield wrecked his

Mercer and killed his riding mechanic in the process. (Strohl, 2009)

Another catastrophic accident, this one during an event in 1916, ended the era of automobile racing at Corona. Michigan native Bob Burman perished when his Peugeot suffered a collapsed wheel and tore through a crowd of spectators. A race track guard, over a dozen fans, and Burman's riding mechanic were also killed in the tragic mishap.

The severity of Bob Burman's 1916 Corona wreck resulted in two significant developments. One was a partnership between Barney Oldfield and race car builder Harry Miller that resulted in the creation of The Golden Submarine, a safety-oriented racing machine that incorporated both a roll cage and a roof. The other was opposition from Corona civic leaders, resulting in the cancellation of future automobile races in the city. (Strohl, 2009)

But the legacy of automobile racing at Corona was securely immortalized through the medium of motion picture film. *The Speed Kings* has even been archived for posterity on YouTube, a 21<sup>st</sup> century archive of often rare and esoteric silent features. It is the collecting of racing footage on movie film that enables race fans and film enthusiasts to experience "real life" events that would otherwise either be lost to the fickle nature of archival selection and historiography, or difficult to find in a culture driven by trends where the popular so often becomes the common.

Automobile racing, for all of its rich history and folklore, and for all of its many connections to corporate sponsorship and television coverage, is still regarded as a rather obscure sport. Race cars and their drivers are seen in advertisements, in newspaper and magazine stories, and in an assortment of marketed artifacts (like souvenir memorabilia, toys, and the packaging of products like cereal, snack foods, and soft drinks). Despite this, automobile racing still struggles to assert itself as a truly "mainstream" sport matching the level of professional football, baseball, basketball, or ice hockey. During the early-to-mid-1990s, when NASCAR (the National Association of Stock Car Automobile Racing) enjoyed its peak popularity and the loyal audience that goes with such acclaim, the sport still found itself coming in second to the NFL in regard to overall fan acceptance.

And not to say that NASCAR did not try to match the NFL's popularity with fans of all ages. Live television coverage of all



NASCAR Winston Cup (now known as the Sprint Cup) events brought the door-to-door, nose-to-tail, high-speed excitement of big time stock car racing into a majority of North American homes through cable networks like ESPN, TBS (the Turner Broadcasting System), and TNN (The Nashville Network). These cable efforts rode the coattails of CBS Television and that network's successful live, flag-to-flag coverage of the 1979 Daytona 500. That race ended with a last lap accident involving the cars of Donnie Allison and Cale Yarborough, who were fighting for the lead while racing down the backstretch at 200 miles-per-hour. The resulting accident allowed Richard Petty to win the race, while Allison, Yarborough, and Donnie's brother, Bobby Allison, had a somewhat-clumsy fistfight in the infield.

The aftermath of the 1979 Daytona 500, which wound up on the front pages of Monday morning newspapers from Central Florida to New York City to Los Angeles, helped NASCAR become a recognized player in professional sports. Despite the excitement of "The Great American Race" and its fame as the "Super Bowl" of stock car racing, the Daytona 500 continues to roll amidst the changing tides of audience attitudes. It is only those watershed years when something wild (like Denny Hamlin's photo-finish win by .011 seconds in 2016) or tragic (like Dale Earnhardt's death on the final lap in 2001) occurs that the Daytona 500 emerges from the clutter of Sunday afternoon basketball and ice hockey results.

And the Daytona 500 is not the only major motorsports event to struggle for intermittent international attention. Consider the plight of the famed Indianapolis 500. The race dates back to 1911, when Ray Harroun wheeled his Marmon "Wasp" around the Brickyard at an average speed of 74.590 miles-per-hour to win the inaugural running of what would become known as "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing". (Racing-Reference) The 2016 edition of the Indy 500 was the 100<sup>th</sup>-running of the race (the event was cancelled during World Wars I and II), and well-regarded for both its standing-room-only audience and its storybook finish when 24-year old American driver Alex Rossi utilized fuel saving strategies to outsmart his competition wind up in Victory Lane.

While the Indianapolis 500 has been televised on ABC since 1965, the race has only been aired "live" since 1986. From 1965

until 1985, the Indy 500 was either taped for broadcast the following weekend (1965-1970), or shown in a tape delayed format on the evening of the day the race was completed (1971-1985). (IndyCar) This is the point where we need to consider how race footage is collected, manipulated, and packaged for consumption. It is this point where we begin to understand how racing footage has been used as part of the narrative structure seen in a number of motion pictures.

We must first acknowledge that the collection of automobile racing footage is customarily manipulated through such variables as camera placement, the actual number of cameras placed in-and-around a venue, and an editing process that maximizes the significance of a particular event. Less exciting moments, like long stretches of single-file racing, for example, will give way to more relevant material, like a last lap pass for the lead and the win. And it is more than routine editing for pace and narrative that alters the footage gathered during an automobile race. Editors may be instructed by network or production company producers to remove footage that casts a less-than-appropriate light on the intended narrative arc being created.

An example of this can be seen in current coverage of live NASCAR Sprint Cup events on national television networks like NBC and Fox Sports. It is inherently difficult for a broadcast team to speak enthusiastically about how on-track competition has been improved through the implementation of a new, low-downforce aerodynamic rules package when camera pans of the grandstands show huge sections of vacant seats. Many NASCAR tracks have covered those now-empty seats with large banners or signage touting any number of corporate interests, but the damage – caught on camera – has already been done. The excitement of contemporary NASCAR has yet to attract the same number of spectators that the sport did during its peak of popularity during the 1990s.

This dilemma stems from the basic nature of human agency. Simply put: when more than one camera captures footage of any event, that footage must be edited into singular views that can be broadcast to an audience via television or film. As soon as two cameras are utilized, choices need to be made regarding what is shown to the viewer. Such a choice requires some sense of an appropriate or necessary narrative.

Consider the oxymoron of what we call “reality television”. Part of the allure of a program like “Survivor” is the show’s creation of a dichotomy. On one end of the narrative spectrum, there is a “good” character who reflects behaviors, values, and attitudes that are respected by the overall audience. On the other end of this spectrum, there is also a “bad” character who reflects behaviors, values, and attitudes deemed detrimental or “wrong” by the intended audience. By establishing these two extremes based on values and behaviors, the show’s editors can then create a conventional narrative.

These character archetypes are created through the editing process wherein calculated choices are made concerning the expression of desired traits and behaviors. By selecting particular film clips and sound bites over others, the production team of a television program can weave a narrative that drives a plot while maintaining the semblance of “authentic” footage. That said: film clips and sound bites may also be consciously selected and omitted if they reflect behaviors not fitting the intended narrative structure and character portrayal sought by those in charge of creating the telecast.

Such control over collected footage is even more important when it comes to making a motion picture. With a theatrical film project, there are costs and physical logistics to consider. Personnel and performers can be highly expensive to movie’s shooting budget, not to mention the expense of post-production tasks like sound mixing, adding any required special effects, and the aforementioned (and all-important) editing process.

But making a major motion picture also involves a much more rigorous narrative structure. Unlike a reality television program, where the intent is to reflect unscripted and authentic behavior, a movie is solely driven by its story, screenplay, and script. The plot of a motion picture is paramount to the entire project. To create a successful film, one needs a finely-tuned plot.

When it comes to sports-related movies, filmmakers often gravitate toward established themes or tropes that are appropriate to the overall nature of athletic competition. A protagonist whose ascent to sporting glory borrows from the recognized cultural mythos of Horatio Alger, Jr.’s “rags-to-riches”

success story<sup>1</sup> will be more easily identifiable to audiences than other types of characters simply because Alger's narrative is common knowledge, or at least recognizable (if not oversimplified) as a popular adage.

Motorsports fit neatly into such established and revered formulaic tales because such forms of competition reaffirm numerous sociocultural tropes. In Mack Sennett's *The Speed Kings*, for example, theater audiences were treated to much more than just physical, "slapstick" comedy as performed by Ford Sterling and Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle; film viewers could relate to the story because of its attention to the universal and timeless narratives of "love conquers all" and "good vanquishes bad". Sennett's 1913 silent short also reminds its audience that sometimes the way to get what you want is to cheat (Mabel Normand's father tampers with the engine of Teddy Tetzlaff's car, costing the driver the race) and that little can interfere with the allure of star-crossed lovers (Normand drives off with "bad boy" Tetzlaff at the film's end, despite her father's displeasure with the romance).

Narrative and the conventions it presents are at the center of all racing films. The sheer visual and aural thrill of seeing high-powered machines careening around ovals or road courses means little if it is not hung onto a contextual framework. Even a "non-fiction" film like a documentary must adhere to some sort of narrative web.

Two truly stunning automobile racing-based documentaries are *Weekend of a Champion* (1972) by acclaimed filmmaker Roman Polanski and *Senna* (2010) by Asif Kapadia. Despite the films being solely about true life events involving actual people, both movies propel their stories through the use of a narrative arc.

*Weekend of a Champion* centers on the 1971 Grand Prix of Monaco and the experiences of British World Champion Formula One driver Jackie Stewart. Not only does the documentary show Stewart's dominating performance in the race itself, but it also

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<sup>1</sup> Some literary and/or cultural critics believe that Alger's tale is more accurately regarded as one of "rags-to-respectability". While Alger's boy protagonists achieve "success" through their diligence to honorable behaviors and strong personal morality, they typically achieve the *respect* of their elders more than they do actual monetary rewards.

provides audiences with a behind-the-scenes look into the psychology of a winning race car driver. Stewart talks about his upbringing, his methodology when analyzing a track, and his way of setting up a car to provide the feel and performance he seeks when racing against the world's finest drivers. By the end of the film, it becomes very clear that, at the time of filming, Jackie Stewart was indeed perhaps the finest to take the wheel. While the race weekend begins with wet weather conditions and questions about strategy, it ends with Stewart taking his No. 11 Tyrrell-Ford to Victory Lane after leading all eighty laps of the original Monaco layout.

If it were not for the subtext of rainy weather, challenging decisions about setting up the car, and the off-track demands of being a champion F1 driver (meeting contest winners, dealing with the media, and mentoring a young teammate), *Weekend of a Champion* would be little more than a one-sided highlight film depicting one car's dominance at a historic venue.

Much the same is true for the award-winning documentary *Senna*. In order to tell the tragic story of Ayrton Senna, the three-time Formula One World Driving Champion from Brazil, director Kapadia needed to weave relatable context into the hours of racing footage collected from television broadcasts to make the movie. Such relevant material (home movies and photographs, interviews with relatives and admirers) added a sociocultural component to the film, especially with regard to Senna's philanthropic causes and status as a role model for his impoverished nation. Without such relatable threads woven throughout the documentary, the film's fabric would be reduced to a collection of exciting, career-defining highlights culled from years' worth of international sports footage.

It is the creation of fictional narrative subtext that gives racing films their broad audience appeal. While automobile racing and many other forms of motorsports are popular with fans around the globe, they do not possess enough human drama to sustain a feature-length movie. While racing fans (and the author) believe otherwise – motorsports involve deeply “human” dramatic qualities that relate to many so-called universal truths or lessons – writers and directors feel that it is necessary to include more “familiar” storylines.

Most of these familiar storylines revolve around the romantic relationships between a driver and the various women in his often-complicated life.<sup>2</sup> The complications in a driver's life come from the uncertainties of racing: the excessive travel, the allure of oversexed groupies, the demands of sponsors who crave victories at all costs, the precarious nature of driving jobs that can be lost to a car owner's whim, and – of course – the ever-present threat that your next wreck might be your last.

A film that views all these competitive concerns through the lens of authentic racing footage is Lamont Johnson's 1973 classic *The Last American Hero*. Starring Academy Award winner Jeff Bridges as the moonshiner-turned-NASCAR star "Junior Jackson", the movie is an adaptation of Tom Wolfe's famed 1965 *Esquire* essay "The Last American Hero is Junior Johnson. Yes!"

Much of what audiences see in *The Last American Hero* are the broader and more mythic narrative archetypes that are so often applied to topics regarding NASCAR racing. The fictional Junior Jackson, like the real life Junior Johnson, lived in near poverty as part of a family that eked out a subsistence living by distilling and delivering corn liquor. Jackson found that he could earn bragging rights among his peers and respect from his rural North Carolina community by racing his moonshine car on a local dirt track.

Being a winning driver inspires Jackson to seek out better opportunities, resulting in him buying a used Sportsman car to race at Hickory Speedway. Despite blowing an engine during the Hickory event, Junior gets noticed by a Grand National (now Sprint Cup) car owner who hires him to drive a top-of-the-line Chevrolet in a big time NASCAR race at Martinsville Speedway in Virginia. Junior Jackson drives the car, takes control of his own on-track fortunes by ignoring his car owner's competitive demands, and wins the race as the ultimate underdog – a driver who climbs behind the wheel with nothing more than his name,

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<sup>2</sup> Although not all movies based on motorsports have a man as their protagonist. The 1983 bio-pic *Heart like a Wheel* depicts the real life story of three-time National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Top Fuel champion Shirley "Cha Cha" Muldowney. Despite her frustration over the casting of Bonnie Bedelia, Muldowney felt the film was a positive step for the sport of professional drag racing.

his courage, his talent, and his desire to beat the best in stock car racing at their own game. As the closing credits roll, young upstart Junior Jackson is meeting with the media, holding his first-place trophy high in the air and looking forward to the next big race.

In order to make Jackson's story more appealing to a larger audience and to give the plot added drama (as if outrunning NASCAR's greats on one of the most challenging and revered tracks on the schedule was not enough), the racing action is interspersed with scenes depicting Junior's need to provide for his family during his father's incarceration, his willingness to stand up against culturally-recognized authority figures as a romanticized "noble" outlaw, his anxiety about leaving the security of his home, and his weakness for a NASCAR secretary/groupie (played by Valerie Perrine) who comforts lonely drivers as a means by which to escape her own solitary life.

This movie's attention to NASCAR culture and the nomadic nature of stock car racing led to the film being regarded as a docudrama. While the human frailties of loneliness, love, and loss are readily seen throughout the story's dramatic elements, it is the film's use of race footage from a Grand National event at Martinsville Speedway that provides the documentary-like quality that gives the film its realistic edge.

The race footage used by Lamont Johnson for *The Last American Hero* was most likely gleaned from either of two NASCAR Grand National events run at Martinsville in 1972. Both races – the Virginia 500 in April and the Old Dominion 500 in September – were won by Richard Petty driving a 1972 Plymouth. The Coca-Cola sponsored car driven by Junior Jackson to victory over Petty (called "Kyle Kingman" in the film<sup>3</sup>) was really a 1972 Chevrolet that was driven in real life by NASCAR Hall of Famer Bobby Allison. While Allison finished second to Petty in both Martinsville races during the 1972 season, Lamont Johnson obviously selected footage where Allison was running ahead of Petty so as to depict Junior

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<sup>3</sup> What makes the fictional name "Kyle Kingman" so interesting here is the fact that NASCAR Hall of Famer Richard Petty is popularly known as "The King". He also has a son named Kyle, who also drove in NASCAR competition for many years.

Jackson's come-from-behind victory that was so pivotal to the end of the film and the resolution of the story.

Such is the nature of most racing-based movies where the action on-track is secondary to the trials and tribulations affecting the characters when not in high-speed competition. Even a true docudrama like *Le Mans* (1971), where much of the footage was filmed in in 1970 during the legendary twenty-four hour, sports car endurance race, relies on a romantic subplot to keep the audience more closely engaged.

Steve McQueen plays American driver Michael Delaney, who returns to race at Le Mans after suffering injuries in a serious accident the previous year. The accident killed a revered competitor, Piero Belgetti, whose widow, Lisa (played by Elga Andersen), also returns to Le Mans for the big race. It is implied, yet not explicitly stated, that both Delaney and Lisa believe that Delaney was partly responsible for Piero's death. Despite the atmosphere of guilt and anger surrounding these two principal characters, there is obvious romantic and sexual tension between Delaney and Belgetti's widow. Despite this storyline, the true star of *Le Mans* is the twenty-four hour race itself.

The movie's air of authenticity has led to its recognition as something of a cult classic among automobile racing enthusiasts. Steve McQueen hoped to actually drive in the 1970 event, but he was not allowed to, even though he piloted a Porsche 908/2 and finished second in the twelve-hours of Sebring endurance race in Florida. The #29 Porsche McQueen drove at Sebring also raced at Le Mans in 1970, albeit under the official car ownership of "Solar Productions". Drivers Herbert Linge and Jonathan Williams drove the car, even though its performance was severely affected by its heavy payload of motion picture cameras. This handicap kept the car from having a true shot at winning, but it managed to capture some of the most true-to-life racing footage ever collected on film.

Entering real race cars in events to serve as camera vehicles was nothing new in the business of filmmaking. Such classic automobile racing movies as the afore-mentioned *Le Mans* (1971) and, before that, *Grand Prix* (1966) set the stage for turning competitive machines into camera machines. Using race cars as camera cars not only enabled filmmakers to gather authentic footage while in the midst of competition, but it avoided



the expensive need to recreate events on a sound stage or through the use of special effects. The use of computer-generated images and animation has helped more recent racing films like *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* (2006) to portray impossible on-track feats like a barrel-rolling Sprint Cup car that crashes for such a long time that NASCAR on NBC announcer Bill Weber can break for a commercial and return to the broadcast while the accident continues to unfold on camera<sup>4</sup>.

While such special effects magic can create a fanciful narrative that places emphasis on the nature of the sporting story being told, this treatment of an inherently-exciting event like automobile racing can result in a movie that seems disingenuous. Not that a racing film must be regarded in the same manner as a documentary, but the production should – if it seeks to gain the respect of audiences – strive to maintain as authentic an approach to the sport as realistically possible.

Two motion pictures that present automobile racing in such an authentic way are two previously-mentioned features that are today regarded as perhaps the finest, most realistic automobile racing movies ever produced: John Frankenheimer's *Grand Prix* (1966) and Lee Katzin's *Le Mans* (1971). Both films border on the edge of being documentaries because of their close attention to maintaining a sense of authenticity. These two feature films rightly deserve their categorization as docudramas.

Oddly enough, *Grand Prix* and *Le Mans* are linked by their connections to the late Steve McQueen. When John Frankenheimer was casting *Grand Prix*, he wanted McQueen to play the role of American Formula One driver Pete Aron. When McQueen met with producer Edward Lewis, according to a historical feature included on a 2006 Blu-ray release of the film, the two men quickly despised each other. McQueen, an amateur

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<sup>4</sup> This barrel-rolling NASCAR wreck at Talladega is perhaps an homage to one of the accidents depicted in the automobile racing movie *Days of Thunder* (1990) starring Tom Cruise. In that film, a Sprint Cup Chevrolet Lumina gets hit and thrown airborne. The stock car rolls side-over-side wildly in a horrifying yet spectacular manner. *Talladega Nights* plays up several connections to Cruise and *Days of Thunder*, including Ricky Bobby's begging for Tom Cruise's help after experiencing a wreck and stripping down to his underwear, and the casting of John C. Reilly as best friend and fellow NASCAR driver Cal Naughton. Reilly also appeared in *Days of Thunder* as a member of Cole Trickle's (Tom Cruise's) pit crew.

racer in his own right, wanted nothing to do with the project. His blatant dislike of Lewis led Frankenheimer to cast James Garner in the role of Aron.

*Grand Prix* was dedicated to recreating an authentic racing experience for theater audiences. Not only did John Frankenheimer recruit Formula One drivers to appear in the film, including world champions like Phil Hill, Jim Clark, Graham Hill, and Jack Brabham, but projecting the movie on screens in Cinerama added to the overall sensory experience of being inside the cars themselves. The film is basically a review of the 1966 Formula One season, with Frankenheimer adjusting his filming demands according to what was happening at the various events he and his production crew were attending.

To supplement the authentic footage shot during competition and make it better fit the storyline of the film, John Frankenheimer would re-shoot F1 events on the Monday or Tuesday following the real life race. The principal actors playing the roles of drivers would climb behind the wheels of actual Formula-type cars (F3 cars, in most cases, because of their slightly-reduced horsepower) and recreate races on the very tracks where the true event had just taken place. In order to turn his actors into racers, Frankenheimer (an amateur race car driver himself) enrolled James Garner, Yves Montand, Brian Bedford, and Antonio Sabato in the Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving in Arizona<sup>5</sup>.

To help ensure authenticity, Bondurant (an F1 veteran) served as a driving consultant on the film, while Phil Hill piloted a Le Mans-style Ford GT40 endurance racer that had been modified into a high speed camera car. No challenge to replicating the on-track racing experience was ignored by John Frankenheimer, including having his sound engineers use tape recorders to capture the internal sounds made by cars at speed. Veteran racers Phil Hill and Richie Ginther went so far as to

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<sup>5</sup> According to a short documentary about the making of *Grand Prix* included on the film's 2006 Blu-ray release, only James Garner actually possessed the talents necessary for being a competitive race car driver. The other three actors had little or no experience with driving cars, so they had to learn from the very beginning. Professional drivers admitted that Garner could have made a career as a race car driver had he started earlier and dedicated himself to the sport. That said: James Garner enjoyed racing and spent time around the business, including being friends with legendary NASCAR driver Curtis Turner.

replicate the gear-change points used by drivers in the Grand Prix of Monaco – the race featured at the beginning of the film – by turning laps at Riverside Raceway in California and shifting at precisely the exact time as when gears would be changed at Monaco.

Such dedication to authenticity is not unique when considering the making of sports films. Movies about major league baseball or professional football are relatively easy to shoot because it is not too difficult to recreate a game. Actual stadiums can be “borrowed”, along with extras to serve as fans and actors to play the athletes. Some movies are even filmed during real games in order to situate the principle actors in an authentic, “here’s-proof-we’re-shooting-on-location” environment.<sup>6</sup>

Automobile racing, on the other hand, creates a much larger production challenge. Not only does the studio need to locate and/or fabricate a fleet of racing cars meeting the requirements of the story being filmed, but it also needs to consider just how much of an on-track event the production team can invent. This is why critically-acclaimed racing films try to incorporate authentic footage as captured during actual races. The races, themselves, become an essential part of the overall plot.

Consider a sports movie like *Winning* (1969), starring Paul Newman as Frank Capua, a race car driver with proven talent in multiple competitive series (sports cars and stock cars), yet with an objective to drive in the Indianapolis 500. Romantic subplot aside, this movie revolves around the 1968 running of the Memorial Day classic. Not only do real life Indy drivers like Roger McCluskey, Bobby Unser, and Dan Gurney make appearances as themselves, but Capua’s winning car is the same one Bobby Unser drove to victory at The Brickyard during the 1968 event.

Much of the film’s racing drama, however, came from footage borrowed from another edition of the Indy 500. On the opening lap of the race as depicted in the motion picture, there is

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<sup>6</sup> Popular films have been known to capitalize on local sports teams by filming during real games. *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (1986) included scenes shot during a Chicago Cubs game at Wrigley Field, *Fever Pitch* (2005) was a remake of a British film that turned soccer into Red Sox baseball games at Fenway Park, and *Two Weeks’ Notice* (2002) included a scene filmed during a New York Mets game.

a horrible multi-car accident that prompts the use of a red flag. In motorsports, a red flag denotes immediate stoppage of the race, typically because of a serious mishap involving either injuries, a death, or severe damage to the racetrack itself. There was, in fact, a serious opening lap wreck during the 1966 Indianapolis 500, just prior to when *Winning* was filmed, and footage of that accident became part of the movie's storyline in terms of reflecting characterization.

Whereas the 1966 accident looks wildly violent on film, with open-wheeled race cars spinning out of control and careening into the tall chain-link catch fence along the frontstretch, the actual wreck damaged more vehicles than people. Only one driver (A.J. Foyt) suffered an injury while trying to leave the racing surface following the shunt, although as many as eleven race cars were forced from competition. (1966 Indianapolis 500)

It is the aftermath of this accident that offers a powerful reflection into the character of Frank Capua. As track workers clear the front straight, those cars not involved are waved onto pit road. Capua (Newman) pulls to a stop in his pit stall and remains in his car. While other drivers climb from their machines, Capua stays behind the wheel. He is handed a cup of ice cream during the respite, yet he never leaves his race car. Capua quietly eats his ice cream with his helmet on, his balaclava pushed down enough to allow room for the wooden spoon to enter his mouth, as he stares straight ahead amidst the chaos of the red flag period. As the speedway's public address announcer provides updates about the wreck, Capua sits calmly, awaiting completion of the cleanup and resumption of the race. The accident, to the obsessed Frank Capua, is little more than another impediment on his road to Victory Lane.

One problem with automobile racing movies is that, more often than not, the audience expects to see a vicious accident. Part of this problem stems from the fact that violent racing accidents make mainstream news reports. The death of seven-time NASCAR Sprint Cup champion Dale Earnhardt in 2001 resulted in his accident being covered by not only recognized sports media, but by such media outlets as *Time* magazine (where Earnhardt was featured on the cover) and ABC News'

“Nightline with Ted Koppel”<sup>7</sup>. Major racing accidents can bring tragedy, peril, and sometimes death into a living room, and what was missed by not watching event coverage will be replayed repeatedly for the next day or two. Since audiences have been conditioned to expect violent wrecks in auto races, filmmakers feel compelled to provide them in order to create a more “natural” movie going experience.

Films like the aforementioned *Grand Prix*, *Le Mans*, *Days of Thunder*, and *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* each featured at least one significant racing accident, although these wrecks were created mainly to meet the demands of their particular scripts. Ron Howard’s *Rush* (2013), which retold the story of the 1976 Formula One season and the fierce rivalry between Britain’s James Hunt and Austria’s Niki Lauda for the World Championship, was obligated to include the infamous fiery wreck at the German Grand Prix in which Lauda was seriously injured and disfigured. Lauda’s life-threatening injuries, his painful recovery, and his subsequent return to competition just six weeks later at the Italian Grand Prix provide the impetus for the film’s eventual (and real life) conclusion: the wet-and-wild running of the Japanese Grand Prix where Lauda fails to finish and Hunt goes on, in dramatic fashion, with a broken gearshift, to run well enough to win the world driving title by a single point.

Part of what made *Rush* such a popular film with racing fans was the ways in which Howard and his production team were able to recreate particular events especially for the movie. While audiences saw numerous highlights and various race footage taken from the coverage of actual events, they also saw racing action fashioned from the use of replica cars and computerized special effects.

This, however, is where my particular analysis of racing footage used in motion pictures deviates from what might be the standard means by which to interpret automobile racing films. Whereas racing movies are often seen as adhering to a specific topic, that being automobile competition itself, it is important to

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<sup>7</sup> “Nightline’s” coverage of Earnhardt’s accident at Daytona occurred one week after the actual event. I am aware of this fact because I was one of three special guests who appeared on the program to discuss the aftermath of Earnhardt’s death. The other two guests were Dr. Jerry Punch, a racing commentator for ESPN, and Liz Clarke, a motorsports writer for *The Washington Post*.

differentiate between racing movies that incorporate footage collected from actual events, and those racing movies that recreate events in order to possess footage that would otherwise be impossible to use.

Given this approach to automobile racing movies, we find ourselves limited to films produced in close chronological proximity to the races they feature within their storylines. Hence, in this article, we place emphasis on motion pictures like *Grand Prix*, *Le Mans*, *Winning*, and even *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* than we do more technically-celebrated movies like *Rush*. The same idea holds true for films that show disregard for racing authenticity, as well. A movie like *Days of Thunder*, for example, may have featured exciting, close footage of NASCAR competition, but viewers with a knowledge of stock car racing will quickly notice that the film is inaccurate in its depiction of race action occurring at particular speedways.

Utilizing actual race footage and incorporating it into the storyline of a film provides a sense of not only realism, but serious dedication to providing an accurate portrayal of automobile racing for what the sport truly is: an often violent, always exciting and challenging, and sometimes even romanticized form of competition that borders on modern-day, gladiatorial spectacle.

Whereas *Days of Thunder* attempts to depict a race at Dover International Speedway by, instead, showing footage “borrowed” from a race at Talladega Superspeedway, a comedic treatment of NASCAR like *Talladega Nights* manages to feature authentic race footage collected from Sprint Cup races at the famed, high-banked, 2.66-mile facility. The same could even be said for a movie like *Herbie: Fully Loaded*, where the plucky little Volkswagen Beetle of Disney legend beats NASCAR’s finest (including former driving champions Jeff Gordon, Tony Stewart, and Jimmie Johnson) in a 500-mile Sprint Cup race at Auto Club Speedway of California.

While the exploits of Disney’s “Herbie” were at the center of this film’s plot, it was his presence at a “real” Sprint Cup race that endeavored to make the little car seem more authentic as a competitive racer. Herbie would be even less believable as a race car if it were not for his entry in the NASCAR event that comprises the movie’s conclusion. The best way to make the

Beetle an accepted racer was to include him in footage collected during an actual race weekend. Getting spectators to cheer enthusiastically for Lindsay Lohan and her unconventional racing team was easy. Getting permission from NASCAR to use film shot during the Sprint Cup race as it occurred was even easier. As seen in other automobile racing movies, the production enhanced its overall realism by featuring cameos by popular drivers (and Hendrick Motorsports teammates) Jeff Gordon and Jimmie Johnson. While the end result was the creation of a fantastic story involving a magical Volkswagen, his determined owner, and dreams of big-time racing success, the facts anchoring this fable to recognized reality was authentic race footage of the stars and cars of NASCAR. Even though the event, itself, was kept fairly vague in nomenclature and details, it was intended to provide authenticity through association with racing reality.

And so, movie studios, screenwriters, producers, and directors turn to race cars in “real life” competition to provide the necessary dose of authenticity that allow films to move from narrative fiction to expressive fact. There are few experiences as visual and auditory in nature as automobile racing. The colorful machines with their teams of drivers and mechanics, all embroiled in high-speed competition that often challenges the laws of physics, is the perfect venue through which to explore other, more natural elements like love and jealousy, success and failure, and life and death.

What motion pictures that include scenes of automobile racing offer, albeit strained from time-to-time, is an attempt at achieving this necessary sense of authenticity. Just as Mack Sennett, in 1913, sought used “real” footage from a 250-mile automobile race in Corona, California and included such recognized driver-athletes as Earl Cooper, Teddy Tetzlaff, and the famous Barney Oldfield, so, too, did filmmakers like John Frankenheimer, Lamont Johnson, and Lee Katzin when they used footage collected at such far-flung and significant racing locales as Monaco, Martinsville, and Le Mans. When filmmakers allow motorsports “fact” to enhance the allure of motion picture “fiction”, they brand their productions with much of the realism that racing fans expect, and that movie goers often come to respect.

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## On the Right Track: Battle for Acceptance of Women Stock Car Racers

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### **Abstract**

*This essay examines the cultural barriers faced by female automobile racers in a predominantly male sport. Focusing on stock car racing, it briefly surveys the careers of representative women competitors and identifies obstacles to women racers' success, including the impact of traditional gender roles, fan acceptance, media coverage, and corporate sponsorship.*

### **Cultural Roles of Women**

It's all about gender. Gender signifies the cultural understanding of male and female, while sex signifies the physical facts (Halperin, 2014, p. 450). Socially accepted gender roles and the tension generated by those individuals who cross the established boundaries significantly impact American culture. Writers and commentators, acting according to mainstream socio-cultural understanding, initially identify a man as a painter, a tennis player, or a resident of Maine, while a woman is often first identified by gender: Mrs. John Smith, a women's soccer player, a mother of two children. This subtle distinction illustrates the entrenched cultural bias women face when venturing beyond home and hearth and exposes collective fears about a changing culture.

The traditional societal roles of men and women have been tightly circumscribed. Women were nurturers as wives, mothers, and homemakers who worked in the private sphere, while men dominated the public sphere as leaders and workers outside the home. Eighteenth century women often were accepted as strong and capable individuals, but by the late 19th century the Cult of True Womanhood, which emphasized differences in the sexes, was the prevailing cultural view of women. Ladies were delicate,

modest, and emotional, and required protection. Men were viewed as active and creative, women as reactive and passive (Boutillier & SanGiovanni, 1983).

British educational psychologist Meyrich Booth (1929) posited that because women are physically and psychologically inferior to men they should be educated solely for motherhood and home duties. Basing his views on Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and others, Dr. Edward Clarke of the Harvard Board of Overseers proclaimed that the stress of receiving the same education as men would impair women's reproductive organs (Clarke, 1873/1972, pp. 126-127). Pierre De Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympic Games, believed that female participation in sports went against their "fixed destiny" as mothers and companions of men (as cited in Giulianotti, 2015, p. 97). A more compassionate view came from physical health advocate Bernarr Macfadden (Endres, 2011), who noted that much of a woman's delicacy was a result of her constricting corset and heavy voluminous skirts, and from several women physicians who lectured on the effects of fashion on women's health (Woolson, 1874/1974).

The early 20th century was a time of significant cultural transition for women. There was better access to higher education, greater legal freedom, and a relaxed dress code that permitted more strenuous recreational activities. Women also enjoyed more leisure time as factories provided ready-made clothing and pre-packaged food. While sports were viewed by both men and women as manly rather than gender neutral, and there was an ever present tension between sports participation and femininity, women began to engage in some more ladylike activities, such as swimming, tennis, golf, croquet, and bicycling.

### **Women and the Automobile**

At the same time that women were testing the boundaries of culturally acceptable recreation, a machine was invented that was to be a significant cultural catalyst. Rae (1971, p. 133) observed, "Trying to evaluate the impact of the automobile on American life seems like an exercise in measuring the unmeasurable. No other single innovation of the twentieth century, or possible any century, has so profoundly influenced manners, customs, and living habits...." The first automobiles

made available to the public hit the roads in the last quarter of the 19th century. Shortly thereafter women, knowing a good thing when they saw it, got behind the wheel. In 1888 Berta Benz, wife of automobile manufacturer Karl Benz, became the first woman driver when she piloted her “motor-wagon” (a three-wheeled car with solid rubber tires) on a 66 mile trip with her two teenage sons. Records of the first 20 Waverley electric cars bought in 1898 include six women (Flink, 1970, p. 71).

Henry Ford’s Model T provided the masses with a cheap car. Now the farmer in Iowa and the cotton mill worker in North Carolina might own a car and achieve freedom from having to live close to work, church, and shopping. *Car Illustrated* noted in 1904 that cars allowed women to travel alone farther from home: women drivers “could shop 20 miles away, lunch 40 miles away and still have time to return home for dinner” (as cited in Parissien, 2014, p. 108). In 1917 there were three million motor vehicles on the road; 20 years later the number had soared to 30 million (Allen, 1947, p. 62).

The automobile was a major factor in women’s battle for self-determination. It is ironic that the foremost American cultural icon of the twentieth century, a machine that is a symbol of male power and dominance, also was a key to the social freedom of women. Automobiles offered physical mobility, a sense of social control, and a means of independence (Marsh & Collett, 1987). Women quickly appreciated its liberating properties. Novelist Edith Wharton took an automobile ride in 1903 and “swore then and there that as soon as I could make money enough I would buy a motor; and so I did.” She thought the car was “an immense enlargement of life” (Wharton, 1934, pp. 136-137). When New Jersey began requiring automobile drivers to have licenses in 1906, more than a hundred women applied (Scharff, 1992, p. 23). In *Middletown*, their classic 1929 community study, the Lynds discovered that women would sooner give up food and clothing than the family car (Lynd & Lynd, 1929, pp. 255-256).

Females piloting automobiles blurred the traditional boundaries of the private (home) sphere of women and the public sphere of men. A 1927 article in *Motor* commented, “Every time a woman learns to drive—and thousands do every year—it is a threat to yesterday’s order of things” (as cited in Scharff, 1992, p. 117). There was widespread public resistance to women

driving, and the inept woman driver myth was born as soon as the first female sat behind the wheel. The staid American Automobile Association (AAA) announced in 1925 that “tests had proved conclusively that women drivers were not only as competent as men but even more stable and predictable in their responses to driving situations” (Flink, 1988, p. 163), but the public was skeptical.

### **Women and Sport**

Sport is a very visible reflection of the socio-cultural system in which it operates, and the prevailing cultural views of women athletes inform the views of women in general. Organized sport generally enforces the predominant cultural patterns. Sports, especially physical ones and those fraught with obvious danger and violence, have been considered “a mainstay for the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity” (Anderson, 2002, p. 873), a reaffirmation of the essence of the dominant male. The acts of conquering and domination inherent in sport are means of establishing masculinity and sex status (Getz & Sulpizio, 2008). Former Green Bay Packer Willie Davis said after a Super Bowl victory, “We went out and won the game and preserved our manhood” (Scott, 1979, p. 184). Locker room banter among male athletes boosts confidence in male domination through talk that degrades women and gay men (Curry, 2002).

There is also the long held cultural view that women are biologically and psychologically unsuited to sports such as automobile racing, which require physical and emotional strength and aggressive behavior. The notion of females as physically weak, emotionally fragile, and intellectually lacking has been repeatedly disproved on the track and in the lab (Collins, 1966). Dyer (1982, p. 4) noted that “many sex differences are the consequences of entrenched expectations of society, of difference upbringing, and are a legacy from the past when biological and medical knowledge was quite rudimentary and often wildly inaccurate.” On the psychological side, research consistently shows that personality is as strongly formed by culture as gender; when male and female athletes are scored on the same personality scales and compared to male norms, they are more alike than different (Chodorow, 1971, p. 173; Harris, 1980, pp. 49-57). However, drawing on the traditional view of

women as passive nurturers and men as active doers, male decision makers repeatedly concluded that competition lay solely in the male domain. Women auto racers were constantly rebuffed with pronouncements that they were too physically and psychologically weak and too intellectually limited to race, and certainly not against men (Berger, 1985; Kraditor, 1981, pp. 14-42; Rosenberg, 1982, pp. 1-27).

Science and research aside, the assumption of inherent female inferiority is still trotted out with some regularity. Prior to the landmark 1973 tennis match between Bobby Riggs and Billie Jean King, Riggs said, "Hell, we know there is no way she can beat me. She's a stronger athlete than me and she can execute various shots better than me. But when the pressure mounts and she thinks about 50 million people watching on TV, she'll fold. That's the way women are" (Davies, 2007, p. 432). He added that once he beat King she and other women would go "back where they belong—in the kitchen and the bedroom" (Krebs, 1973, p. 61). Pro tennis player Gene Scott agreed, voicing the commonly held view of the time: "You see, women are brought up from the time they're six years old to read books, eat candy and go to dancing class. They can't compete against men. They're not used to the competition. Maybe it'll change some day. But not now" (Eskenazi, 1973, p. 52). The odds made Riggs an 8-5 favorite, but King won in three seemingly effortless sets.

In the early 1980s longtime NASCAR competitor Banjo Matthews opined that racing is a man's thing. "A women gets excited faster. She can't turn the steering wheel as many times and as hard as a man....When a catastrophe happens, you see the women scream first, not the men" (Wilkinson, 1983, pp. 92-93). In rebuttal, Verta Henell, who in 1982 became the first female NASCAR track champion when she won the Limited Stock Car Division championship at Ascot Park in California, echoed many women drivers when she asserted that successful racing isn't about strength, but about native ability and intestinal fortitude (Warren, 1984).

In World Wars I and II women volunteered as truck and ambulance drivers on the battlefields and as taxi and tractor drivers at home. They flooded into factory work, filling physically demanding jobs previously held by men. With war's end and the availability of a male workforce, women were expected to return

to their traditional place in society. Not all who had successfully handled “men’s” jobs were content to resume the role of the submissive keeper of home and hearth. Women had proved that the workplace was no longer a defensible bastion of male dominance, so the sporting arena gained even greater significance in reinforcing male superiority. Sports emphasizing grace, such as ice skating, and single gender sports, such as golf and tennis, were generally accepted by the American public as appropriate for females, but there was widespread resistance to women invading traditional “male sports.”

Women who participate in sport, particularly physically demanding and dangerous sports, face a role conflict. There is an ongoing tension between femininity and physical skill. The accepted cultural view is that females who invest time and effort in succeeding in vigorous sport lose their femininity and are not “normal” women (Boutillier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Lenskyj, 1986). Sports sociologist Marie Hart concisely defined the cultural dilemma of gender roles and sport: “American society cuts the penis off the male who enters dance and places it on the woman who participates in competitive athletics” (as cited in Sabo & Runfola, 1980, p. xiv).

High-level sports competitors are often viewed by the public as heroic role models. Male heroes are tough, aggressive, strong, daring. Females, or heroines, have a much tougher road. They must be not only exemplary at their sport but also womanly, caring, sacrificing for others, uncompromisingly moral—the traditional traits assigned to females and the traits viewed by society as denoting weakness. As Thompson (1993, p. 396) noted, “Even now the word *heroine* is likely to conjure up the image of a lovely maiden tied to the railroad tracks by a mustachioed persecutor.” America has been ambivalent about female heroes. Certainly some sporting women, such as Mildred “Babe” Didrickson Zaharias and Chris Evert, have been celebrated and widely recognized, but they were presented as feminine individuals who cook, are fashionable, and have other interests and pursuits besides sports, reassuring the public that they are real women who are within the bounds of cultural norms. Zaharias, perhaps the best female athlete ever, was called a “muscle moll” by journalist Paul Gallico (1938, p. 239) when she competed in track and field, but after she married and

turned instead to the more acceptable sport of golf, *Life* magazine announced: "Babe Is a Lady Now: The World's Most Amazing Athlete Has Learned to Wear Nylons and Cook for Her Huge Husband" ("Babe Is a Lady Now," 1947). Pretty female athletes are often referred to in the media as attractive blondes or vivacious brunettes; when is the last time one saw a story rhapsodizing over a male athlete's raven locks and trim figure? When sports car competitor Evelyn Mull told someone that she raced cars, the surprised reply was usually that she didn't seem the type. Mull said, "I often hear this remark and resent it furiously! If I played tournament bridge or a good game of tennis, no eyebrows would be raised. But when I say I'm a race driver, it's just as though I'd said, 'I eat children'" (Mull, 1958, p. 7).

### **Women go Racing**

From the beginning a few intrepid women competed in the new sport of auto racing. They dressed in the fashions of the day--long, bulky skirts and large brimmed picture hats--but made concessions to practicality by topping their ensembles with protective linen dusters and tying veils under the chin to keep their chapeaus in place. When women were allowed to compete at the Brooklands, England racing circuit in 1908 (in a ladies only race), the drivers bound their long skirts with a rope to avoid the scandal of exposing their legs (Bullock, 2002, p. 31).

Most of the early female competitors were well to do and came from influential families. Bostonian Eleonora Sears raced cars, played polo, won national tennis and squash championships, did long distance walks, and rode astride her horse, but was protected by her social status (Condon, 1991, pp. 50-54). Wealthy Joan Newton Cuneo of Long Island led a conventional life until she purchased a steam Locomobile in 1902. For the next 10 years she was renowned for her prowess in both auto racing and cross-country driving. When the petite Cuneo raced she was quite successful; she was the sole female driver in the first Glidden Cup Tour in 1905, a thousand mile trek. In the February 1909 New Orleans Mardi Gras races she finished second to the legendary Ralph De Palma. Most males opposed Cuneo's participation in racing, and she was often banned from competing. In mid-1909 the AAA Contest Board

limited sanctioned events to males aged 18 and older (Nystrom, 2013).

Given the stiff opposition, it took a special breed of women to persevere and ultimately compete successfully in open events. One of the early stars was Madame Camille du Gast, a wealthy widow who enjoyed the adrenaline rush of doing risky things; she also tried skiing, parachute jumping, ballooning, and shooting. Du Gast, competing against 170 men in the 1901 Paris-Berlin race, finished 33<sup>rd</sup> even when she was made to start last. Two years later she was the lone women in a field of 224 in the 1903 race from Paris to Madrid. Wearing the long skirt and corset fashionable at the time, she was in eighth place before she stopped to help a competitor who had crashed and was pinned under his car. While she was generally popular, there was some criticism. A report in *The Autocar* noted, "The gallant Frenchmen applauded and raised their hats, but for ourselves we must confess to a feeling of doubt as to whether fierce long-distance racing is quite the thing for ladies" (as cited in "Camille du Gast," n.d.). The same year she was offered a ride by the Benz factory racing team for the Gordon Bennett Cup, but was prevented from accepting it because the Automobile Club de France prohibited women from racing due to "female nervousness" (Davis, 1955, pp. 13-30; Resteck & Schuster, n.d.; Watts, 1994, p. 18; Wise, 2001, p. 80).

Dorothy Levitt was the first Englishwoman to enter public auto races. A talented driver, she was tolerated by the male establishment chiefly because a woman driver was seen as an entertaining novelty. The newly formed Brooklands Automobile Racing Club, an all-male establishment, refused to allow her to race there, using the logic that as the Jockey Club didn't allow female jockeys, there was no reason to allow women drivers. The De Dion Company used her to attract publicity, and in 1904 she piloted one of their cars as the only woman driver in the Heresford 1000-miles trial. She finished second when her car developed mechanical problems. In 1907 she finished fourth of 172 drivers, men and women, in the Herkomer Trial in Germany (Bullock, 2002, pp. 16-17, 26; Davis, 1955, pp. 31-44).

Women were enthusiastic competitors in hill-climbs and road races. The first female to win a major event was Jannine Jennky, who took first at Gaillon in 1927. Elizabeth Junek, a star driver in



the 1920s, drove her Bugatti to a second place finish in the 1926 Swiss Grand Prix and a fifth in Sicily's famed Targa Florio road race in 1928 ( Bullock, 2002, pp. 76-77; Davis, 1955, pp. 137-146). One of the more colorful early women racers was Gwenda Glubb Hawkes, who satiated her desire for excitement by driving everything, from an ambulance in World War I to dogsleds in Canada. At one time she held 76 racing records, including the record at Montlhery in France for the fastest lap ever, man or woman (Davis, 1955, pp. 77-99; Watts, 1994, p. 18).

In 1930 Odette Siko, with Marguerite Mareuse as her co-driver, became the first woman to enter the grueling 24 Hours of LeMans. Among the entrants in 1935 was an MG works team with all women drivers. Helene Mariette Delangle, known as Helle Nice, competed successfully in women's races and hill climbs and finished high in several Grand Prix events in the 1930s. Kay Petre was one of the female superstars of this era, racing regularly at Brooklands, where her cool demeanor and excellent driving skills convinced many people that women were capable of handling big, fast race cars. She competed at LeMans several times and finished 11th in the 1936 South African Grand Prix (Bullock, 2002, pp. 73-75, 84; Davis, 1955, pp. 45-76; "1930 Hours of Le Mans," 2015; Seymour, 2004).

Given the achievements of women in auto racing up to World War II, one might expect a shift in cultural mores. Not so. The public demanded a feminine, nurturing nature first and foremost. The 1941 film *The Blonde Comet* featured a female driver who is leading the Indianapolis 500 but leaves the race so that the man she loves, who has wrecked his car, can use hers and win.

World War II brought racing to a standstill, but the sport was revitalized in the years following as automobiles and tires became available again and veterans returned from combat to resume competition. The growth of stock car racing and the formation of NASCAR in 1947 provided a promising venue for adventurous women drivers. Race promoters were always looking for ways to sell more tickets, and a number of them tried sponsoring women-only events, called powderpuff races. NASCAR founder Bill France staged a women's race on the Daytona Beach and Road Course in 1940. He stationed flagmen along the course to keep the drivers at a reasonable speed, but

the women ignored them. Winner Evelyn Reed averaged 68.4 mph. She was deemed “a heavy-footed miss” in the local newspaper and a reporter noted, “These gals could handle the race cars. A few of the male observers must have felt ashamed” (Lazarus, 2004, pp. 100-101).

In the stock car venue three women who began racing against female competitors went on to successfully compete against men: Sara Christian, Ethel Flock Mobley, and Louise Smith. Sara Christian, wife of garage owner and bootlegger Frank Christian, was perhaps the most talented of the trio and might well have become a superstar had she not been forced to retire following a severe back injury suffered in a November 1949 crash at Lakewood Speedway in Atlanta. She finished fifth in a NASCAR strictly stock race in Langhorne, Pennsylvania the same year, the highest a woman has ever placed in NASCAR’s top racing series.

Ethel Flock Mobley, the sister of racers Tim, Bob, and Fonty Flock, became the first woman to compete against men in Georgia when she entered a race at Central City Park Speedway in Macon. In competition with her brothers in the July 10, 1949 NASCAR race on the Daytona Beach and Road Course, Ethel finished 11th ahead of Bob and Fonty, while Tim finished second. In June 1949 she drove against a field of 57 male drivers in Florida, finishing eighth. Racing primarily in the Atlanta area, she competed in more than a hundred NASCAR Modified races before retiring to spend more time with her family (“Ethel Flock Mobley,” 2015).

The racing career of Louise Smith of Greenville, SC, epitomizes the difficult path trod by women racers attempting to gain entry into stock car racing. Smith was an independent, strong-willed woman with a big personality and a commanding physical presence. She exhibited behaviors considered to be on the male side of the ledger: she was a risk taker, she embraced opportunities when they came her way, and she never gave up. Motorsports writer Jason Stein summed it up when he said, “There are pioneers who break new ground, and then there’s Louise Smith, a woman who took dynamite to conventional thinking” (Stein, 2006, p. 20).

Smith encountered widespread hostility, sometimes physical, from male drivers, but her persistence led many of them to

accept her into their ranks. She came from the same blue collar background and enjoyed the same hard partying lifestyle they did. The good ol' boys recognized a good ol' girl when they met one. However, they stopped short of fully valuing her driving skills, usually observing that Smith did well "for a woman." Smith raced 1946-1956, primarily in Modified events (Wise, 2012; Kreszock, Wise, & Freeman, 2014).

Smith was the first woman to compete in U.S. Auto Club stock car races (Holder, 2000). The Anderson Company offered her a car for the 1948 Indianapolis 500, but the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Board denied her the opportunity because its policy prohibited women on the track (Moore, 2003; Williams, 1993), a ban which did not fall until Janet Guthrie became the first woman to try to qualify for the Indianapolis 500 in 1976 (Guthrie failed to qualify for the 1976 Indianapolis 500 due to mechanical problems, but competed in the race in 1977 and 1978).

Smith's 1999 election to the International Motorsports Hall of Fame, the first woman to be so honored, brought the exploits of a female competitor to the national stage. While pleased to be chosen, she was candid in her comments. She expressed frustration at being nominated three times before being elected, chastising some of the sportswriters who voted for trying to keep her out. She noted that her certificate was inscribed "Louis" rather than "Louise" Smith and that she received a man's ring although her selection had been announced in sufficient time for a woman's ring to be made (Berman, 2001, p. E10; Golenbock 2004, p. 19; Kreszock, M., Wise, S., & Freeman, M., 2014, p. 118).

Smith did not see herself as a pioneer for other females in racing. She spoke often of the difficulties she encountered as a women competing in a man's sport, but she did not mentor aspiring woman drivers who followed her. After retiring as a driver Smith chose to sponsor male drivers and much preferred being around "her boys." In fact, she once publicly criticized driver Janet Guthrie for pulling off pit road and impeding her friends David Pearson and Richard Petty (Williams, 1987). Smith's greatest involvement with women in racing in her later years was as a beauty contest sponsor, where women were adornments rather than racers. She likely saw no contradiction in

this, but embraced her role of supporting her mostly male racing friends. However, she proved, in an era when the media portrayed the ideal American woman as an attractive housewife in the Harriet Nelson/June Cleaver mold, that a woman could exert independence and have a successful racing career. Succeeding as a woman in an arena dominated by men requires not only talent but also boundless enthusiasm, unwavering self-confidence, dogged persistence, and a lot of luck. Louise Smith had it all.

### **Women in Racing since Louise Smith**

Given Smith's longevity, close ties with individuals in the stock car racing establishment, and the sheer force of her personality, and bolstered by the competence displayed by her female NASCAR racing contemporaries Sara Christian and Ethel Flock Mobley, one might expect the flood gates to open for women drivers in NASCAR. It was not to be. In a pattern that still persists, promoters saw female competitors solely as a gimmick to boost attendance. Once the sport attained firm financial footing, the welcome mat was removed. In most racing venues women encountered legal and other, more subtle, means of discrimination. AAA had sanctions against women competing against men in official contests. Indianapolis Motor Speedway banned women both from competing on the track and entering the pits. Driver Lyn St. James remembers going to the Indianapolis 500 as a teenager and being left outside the wire fence while her male friends went into Gasoline Alley and got autographs from the drivers (St. James, 2002, p.160).

While individual tracks sometimes banned women drivers altogether or limited them to women only races, NASCAR never overtly prohibited women from open competition. However, as the circuit stabilized and grew, women were barely tolerated. They encountered difficulties in acquiring sufficient financial backing and getting their race cars through technical inspection. NASCAR posted "No Women in the Pits" signs in the 1970s: no mechanics, no journalists, no photographers, not even owners ("Women on the Track," 2002, p. 48). The signs didn't come down at the major tracks until 1973, when female photographer Dorsey Patrick threatened to bring suit (Bledsoe, 1975, p. 89).

Legal barriers have long since disappeared, although informal discrimination and attitudinal prejudice still surface.

In the mid-seventies most of the male cadre in stock car racing still believed that the only legitimate role in the sport for a woman was as a trophy queen. The October 1972 issue of *Stock Car Racing Magazine* featured a special section on women in racing that proclaimed Linda Vaughn “the most popular female in racing history” (“An Intimate Conversation,” 1972, p. 26). That was probably an accurate statement. Vaughn, who has done much to promote racing, is a blonde, well-endowed woman who has represented racetracks and corporate sponsors for many years. The two small photos of women drivers in the spread were captioned, “Fred Lorenzen offers a few pointers to fellow STP driver Paula Murphy” and “Sheila Hayes is probably America’s most attractive stock car driver” (Berggren, 1972, pp. 20-21), emphasizing the female’s need for male guidance and the importance of her physical appearance.

Women kept knocking on the door, but nobody was answering. The first woman to follow Smith to the top tier of NASCAR racing was Janet Guthrie 20 years later. When Guthrie debuted at the World 600 in May 1976, her presence harkened back to Bill France’s original use of women drivers to boost ticket sales. Charlotte Motor Speedway promoter H. A. “Humpy” Wheeler, a modern day P. T. Barnum whose promotional stunts are legendary, invited her to drive in the event. He put her together with Lynda Ferreri, a Charlotte bank executive who quickly assembled a race team on a shoestring budget. Guthrie drove a Chevrolet prepared by the legendary Ralph Moody.

Guthrie was not welcomed by the male drivers and car owners. Most were distant and some were openly antagonistic. Driver David Pearson said that Guthrie should be “home having babies” (White, 1993, p. 6). Driver Buck Baker acknowledged Guthrie’s positive attitude, but believed that she did not have the experience or physical strength to pilot a car for a grueling six hundred miles and finish at the front. He thought that Louise Smith was the only woman driver he had ever seen who was strong enough to get the job done (Vehorn, 1976, p. 32). The 38-year-old Guthrie qualified 27th and finished 15th in a car she had never driven before. “People snickered that she’d never make 600 miles. Well she surprised them, and when the race was over

she was in a lot better shape physically than most of the others,” recalled Moody (Myers, 1994, p.104). Guthrie drove in 33 NASCAR Winston Cup races 1976-80, finishing in the top 12 ten times. Her best finish was a sixth at Bristol.

Patty Moise, who competed in NASCAR 1987-1998, said that when she first appeared on the Busch circuit she was treated as an outcast. Track security guards would harass her, constantly demanding to see her pass, as though she shouldn't be there. She noted that most of the problem behavior came from drivers at smaller tracks, while NASCAR stars like Dale Earnhardt, Mark Martin, and Ken Schrader were friendly and helpful to her (Williams, 2002).

Shawna Robinson debuted in NASCAR's Goody's Dash Series in 1988, winning rookie of the year honors and being voted the Series' most popular driver two years in a row. She finished third in points two straight years. In 2001 she became the first woman to compete in a Cup race since Patty Moise in 1987. A skilled, experienced driver, she likely would have gotten a Cup ride earlier had she been male. In 2002 Robinson drove for BAM Racing, a small team without the financial backing to compete successfully at the top level. Two engine builders refused to supply engines for the team because the driver was female (Williams, 2002, p. 60). Given Robinson's undeniable talent, her career never reached the height that might be expected.

While stock car racing was dragging its feet, other racing venues were gradually waking up to the positive value of women competitors. The accolade of the most successful woman auto racer ever goes hands down to Shirley Muldowney, who won three National Hot Rod Association (NHRA) Top Fuel dragster championships, the first person, male or female, to do so. Incredibly, Muldowney struggled to find sponsors throughout her career. However, drag racing has been a wide-open door for women in the last decade. In 2012 Erica Enders and Courtney Force won national events on the same day. In 2015 Enders became the first female driver to capture two NHRA Pro Stock Championships in a row. On the Indycar front, four women (Katherine Legge, Pippa Mann, Ana Beatriz, and Simona de Silvestro) started in the 2013 Indianapolis 500 field of 33.

The appearance of Danica Patrick on the stock car scene has generated a widespread awareness of women racers. Patrick, who came to NASCAR from IndyCar racing, was the first woman to win an IndyCar race, the 2008 Indy Japan 300 at Motegi. She also has the highest finish by a woman in the Indianapolis 500, third in 2009. She was the first woman to qualify for a Cup race pole position, the 2013 Daytona 500. Patrick is wildly popular with young people, especially girls, and is a marketing bonanza. She has been a media darling since her arrival in racing. She drives for a top race team and is physically very attractive. Patrick, who freely admits to using her gender as a tool for advancement, has appeared in sexy ads and says, "I realize that part of the reason I'm here...is that I am a woman. Every driver looks for a unique niche, and my niche is I am the only girl running" (Spanberg, 2005, p. 58).

Like other IndyCar drivers who have competed in NASCAR, Patrick has proved to be a middle of the pack racer who has occasional good finishes. Patrick's performance has not convinced some males in the NASCAR family that she is legitimate. Kyle Petty, a former NASCAR driver and television commentator and the son of racing legend Richard Petty, commented in 2013 that she "is not a race car driver....She can go fast, but she can't race....And I don't think she's ever going to be a race car driver" (Gluck, 2013, para. 1, 3). Interestingly, several male drivers stepped up to defend Patrick after Petty's remarks. Dale Earnhardt Jr., Kevin Harvick, Jimmie Johnson, and others noted that she is on a steep learning curve, as are all drivers and particularly those who come from a background of auto racing other than stock cars, and that she runs competitively most of the time (Pockrass, 2013).

There have been several beneficiaries to Patrick's success. Twenty year old Canadian driver Dominique Van Wieringen, who has won at every level she has competed, is debuting in NASCAR's K&N Pro Series East in 2016 (Fenwick, 2016; "Van Wieringen joins Rette Jones Racing," 2016). Also in the 2016 K&N Pro Series is Julia Landauer. Best known for her appearance on the CBS reality program *Survivor*, Landauer has been racing since she was 10 and won the 2015 NASCAR Whelen All-American Series track championship in the Limited Late Model division at Motor Mile Speedway in Dublin, Virginia.

She also looks great in a bikini, which may have contributed to her good fortune (Rodgers, 2016). Again the link between physical attractiveness and opportunities for women athletes comes into play.

### **Obstacles to Racing Success**

There has been pervasive cultural negativity toward female drivers from male competitors. Team owners won't hire a female driver, crew members won't pit for them, and drivers will do everything they legally can to discourage them; David Pearson's reaction to Janet Guthrie is an example. Richard Petty stated his opposition to women drivers in 2006: "I just don't think it's a sport for women," he said. "It's good for them to come in. It gives us a lot of publicity, it gives them publicity. But as far as being a true racer, making a living out of it, it's kind of tough" (The Lady Speaks, 2006). Others are skeptical and must be convinced by her performance that a woman is qualified to be there. Few treat women drivers the same as they do male competitors.

Male opposition to women auto racers was no more clearly exposed than in the story of driver Deborah Renshaw's rise and fall, as analyzed by Sloop (2005). Renshaw was a rising star in 2002, finishing well in the weekly NASCAR-sanctioned races at Nashville, Tennessee, Fairgrounds Speedway. NASCAR saw her as a marketable woman driver who could expand the fan base. On July 14 most of her male competitors pooled money to fund the \$3600 required to have a driver's car inspected. Renshaw's car was found to have a cylinder hold less than one centimeter too large, and her sixth place finish was forfeited. The incident received national coverage. She became the exploited victim and was offered a ride by NASCAR team owner Rick Goodwin on the Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) circuit. In October Renshaw struck another car during practice and the driver was instantly killed. Renshaw lost her ride with Goodwin and was blamed by many for the death. Sloop observed that throughout the saga, gender was the primary focus of media coverage: she was noticed by NASCAR because she is an educated, ladylike driver; she was plotted against because she was a woman daring to succeed in racing's male homosocial environment (Sedgwick, 1985); and she was involved in a tragic wreck because she was a woman driver.



### Fan Attitudes

Some fans have opposed women drivers. In a long letter to the editor of *National Speed Sport News* in 1948, a reader commented that a number of women fans she talked to agreed that racing is strictly a masculine sport and said, "I hope the boys will fiercely resent any feminine invasion into a field that belongs strictly to them." She continued, "If I were one of the boys, I would not only refuse to race with women, I would refuse to race on any track that allowed them." As to the reason for her opposition, the writer could only say, "There's something fundamental about it all" ("Taboo Women," 1948, p. 3). A post on The Lady Speaks blog suggested that women racers are just looking for male attention (Janice, 2012).

### Media Coverage

The quantity and tone of media coverage are significant factors in the acceptance of women auto racers, and women in sports generally. As growing numbers of females compete in sports at ever higher levels, media coverage lags way behind and may be subtly biased (Lavoie, 2013). In the 1989 nationally televised NCAA women's basketball championship game the male announcer repeatedly said "she shoots and misses" rather than phrasing such as "Jones shoots; rebounded by Smith" used in men's games, and called "the girls" by their first names, perhaps revealing a subconscious attitude of women players as inferior (Duncan, 1992). Readers and viewers see the world presented to them as reality, so if women athletes are not present or are shown as second-rate performers, they must not, or should not, exist. A 20 year study of network and cable sports news found that men's sports accounted for 96 percent of the coverage (Messner & Cooky, 2010).

The first focus of the media is usually gender. Motorsports news coverage often expresses a mass culture view of female drivers as different and stereotypically feminine (Sloop, 2005, p. 193). Coverage of the Deborah Renshaw story emphasized that she was feminine, educated, attractive, and from a wealthy family. The *Roanoke Times and World News* described Renshaw striding into the media center clad in "low-rider jeans with a wide black belt and a tight black knit shirt that exposed her

midriff." When she appeared on a Nashville sports talk show, the male host called Renshaw "Ms. Deborah" and reassured listeners that she was ladylike. Other articles described her as "a girl playing a man's game" and portrayed her as the "poor little innocent girl" victim (Sloop, 2005, pp. 198-200).

Early auto racer Ethel Flock Mobley recalled that a photographer had her pose diapering her daughter on the hood of her car, even though the child was too old for diapers. Illustrating the conflict between sports participation and femininity, it was a reassurance to the public that this female auto racer was also a mother and a nurturer (Wise, 2004). If Danica Patrick crashes, a headline is likely to read "Danica Wrecks" ("Danica Patrick Crash," 2014; "Danica Patrick Wreck," 2015; "Danica Wreck Brings Out Red Flag," 2015). There is unlikely to be a corresponding headline that several male drivers also crashed.

While society is far from achieving anything approaching gender parity, there are encouraging signs that the motorsports media is getting past the idea of women racers as freaks rather than serious competitors, and coverage is gradually increasing. The high profile coverage of Danica Patrick brings females to the fore. Coverage is more gender neutral than in the past, with fewer references to "girls" and recitals of physical attractiveness and domestic virtues. Late model racing is a major gateway for drivers who aspire to compete at the top level. In 2000 the monthly magazine *Late Model Racer* published three articles on women drivers, in 2005 one, in 2010 five, and in 2015 seven. There is movement, however glacial, in the right direction.

## Sponsorship

Sponsorship has been the most significant limiting factor in women's participation in upper level auto racing competition. Drivers, both male and female, face the quandary of getting to the top racing series. Does one accept a ride with an under-funded team, knowing that the chance for real success is remote, because another offer may never come along? Or does one wait, hoping for a nibble from a top team? It is particularly difficult for women, who have fewer offers. Fielding a competitive car in a top racing series requires millions of dollars in corporate sponsor support, and companies historically have been unwilling

to fund a woman driver. Janet Guthrie recalled that when she competed she had feelers from several major teams, including McLaren and Bignotti, but she had to bring a sponsor with her, and no corporate body would commit to backing her. She says that the same people who wonder why there aren't more women (and minority) drivers need to understand that "top results requires 75 percent car and 25 percent driver. If you don't have a great car and team, you won't make records." She thinks male corporate executives don't get the same thrill sponsoring women drivers that they do hanging out with macho male drivers (Mangan, 2000, p. 39). Brothers Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Kerry Earnhardt admit that when they were kids and competing in racing, their sister Kelley was the best driver of the three, but even with the iconic Earnhardt name she had much more trouble securing sponsors and even getting people to work on her car than her brothers did (Earnhardt, 2002, p. 37).

NASCAR's fans are noted for their brand loyalty in support of the companies sponsoring their favorite drivers. They are three times more likely to purchase products of NASCAR sponsors ("52 Fantastic Nascar Demographics," 2015; "NASCAR Racing Statistics," 2014). This demographic has revolutionized stock car racing, drawing a much broader array of sponsors into the sport. A segment on CBS' *Sixty Minutes* reported that 18 out of 20 women leaving stores replied affirmatively to the question, "If Heinz [maker of food products] sponsored a car, would you buy Heinz [products]" (Howell 1997, 93). Research indicates that women make as much as 85 percent of household spending decisions (Spanberg 2005, p. 58), making it extremely advantageous to get their attention by fielding drivers they will identify with and support. Janet Guthrie says that potential sponsors need to understand that female spectators follow female drivers (Mangan 2000, p. 39). With products like breakfast cereal, shampoo, and soft drinks adorning the hoods of NASCAR race cars, companies should be lining up to sponsor a woman.

A survey of attitudes towards woman in motorsports (*Time to Drive*, 2005) revealed that both women and men endorse women's involvement in racing, think that women racing inspires young girls, think that it is good for boys and young men to see women racing with men, think women racers draw fans, think

women are a marketing asset, and view women racers as role models. Said racer Sunny Hobbs, "I think corporate America needs to get a backbone and take a little bit of a risk on a female driver" (Kelly, 2002, p. 58-60).

A few companies are getting the message TrueCar.com founder Scott Painter commented that sponsoring women racers in their "Women Empowered" initiative is an opportunity "to get noticed in a space that is dominated by men, and where a lot of big brand marketing dollars go behind something of an old-boy's club of drivers" (Greenberg, 2012). In 2007 AAMCO Transmissions unveiled a marketing campaign featuring IndyCar driver Sarah Fisher, the first woman spokesperson for the company since Zsa Zsa Gabor (Smith, M., 2007, p. 7). Between 2010 and 2015 the web hosting company GoDaddy sponsored Danica Patrick, and as the face of the company her image appeared everywhere, including Super Bowl commercials.

### **NASCAR Marketing**

NASCAR has examined the fan demographics and sees a marketing opportunity. By conservative estimates, 37 percent of NASCAR's 75 million fans are female. Harkening back to Bill France's promotion of Louise Smith's career, NASCAR has a new found appreciation of women competitors as marketing tools. Perhaps for the first time, it truly recognizes the value of women in the sport. To draw in new fan segments, NASCAR established a Drive for Diversity program in 2004 targeting female, Hispanic, and African-American racers. One of the six drivers in NASCAR's class of 2016 Driver Development Program is female; Ali Kern comes to NASCAR from the ARCA series. She will compete in the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East. Of the hundred drivers chosen for the program since its inception, 31 are female. Whether it is good looks or awesome driving skills that catch the sponsor's eye, NASCAR definitely wants to produce top female drivers. It will be instructive to observe just how tangible corporate and racing organization support in aid of that goal will be in the coming years.

### **The Power of Numbers**

Women will continue to have difficulty establishing a solid presence in stock car racing as long as the total pool of female

drivers is small. They must begin competing early in the introductory racing formats and progress en masse through the levels, gaining experience and confidence. A large number of accomplished female drivers will take the intense spotlight off the lone woman competitor and attract sponsors and race teams. There are signs of movement in this direction. The young women of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century grew up playing sports, and the widespread interest in athletics by females has trickled into motorsports. Growing numbers of girls are competing in Go-Karts, Midgets, Micros, Legends, Bandoleros, and other introductory series. In 2005 a record 13 female drivers competed in the Lowes Motor Speedway Summer Shootout series, with at last one in nearly every division (Janovy 2005, p. 8c). The Chili Bowl, an annual high profile sprint car event in Tulsa, Oklahoma, drew 15 women in 2016 with very little fanfare (Smith, D., 2016, p. 9). If they stay with it and gain experience, women racers may find backers who are cognizant of today's consumer dynamics and willing to invest in their talent. Lyn St. James said, "The real message is there are five or 10 more women drivers waiting for a chance for every female driver you saw" (Kelly 2002, p. 58).

## **Conclusion**

A male driver who acquits himself with skill and professionalism in a few races is accepted by his peers as worthy to be on the track. Female drivers seem to start from square one in the eyes of their male competitors in every race, having to prove yet again that they deserve to be there. There is simply not the same element of trust by male drivers. The frequent racing accidents involving male drivers are treated as routine, but one involving a woman driver is examined in detail, the implication being that the female has caused the crash. The "inept woman" attitude is still common throughout sport. With corporate sponsorship a significant factor in race teams' choice of drivers, the issue of physical attractiveness often comes into play for women, rarely for men.

However, there are signs pointing to a growing acceptance of women racers. Young girls and women fans are attracted to the sport by female drivers, as evidenced by Danica Patrick's popularity, and sponsors increasingly seek to attract that market segment. Driver Sunny Hobbs talked about her experiences in

an ARCA race at Daytona in February 2002. "I was walking through the garage and there were these three little girls with their mom, and they were so excited to see me and had me sign the back of their shirts....They were so excited to see a girl get out of a race car (Kelly, 2002, p. 57).

An apocryphal story is instructive. It is 1948 and a race car flies past the grandstand. The female driver's long hair cascades in the wind from beneath her helmet. "Who is that lady?" asks an astonished fan. "That's no lady, that's Louise Smith," is the reply (Martin, 1983, pp. B6-B7)

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# The Digitized Technologies for Older Adult's Leisure, Companionship, and Well-Being

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## **Abstract**

*This paper bring research regarding benefits of the Internet use for older adults up to date and further highlights attributes that help older adults to build their online social network, maintain psychological well-being, and sustain their leisure engagement.*

## **Introduction**

As our society continues to age at an accelerated rate, we are also witnessing another magnificent trend: the rapid dissemination of computer-based digitized technologies. As this wave of digitized technology interfaces with the wave of the aging population, these dual trends are revealing a profound implication for our society, specifically for older people. With the enrichment of social opportunities provided through the Internet, older adults may immerse themselves in to the online world to expand their social network, freely access health-related information, keep up with family and friends, and frequently enjoy various forms of leisure activities. According to The Pew Research Center's late report, nearly sixty percent of older adults now go online (Smith, 2014). Apparently, the Internet infrastructure has been recognized as a new avenue for many older adults to maintain a healthy leisure life style. This paper attempts to bring research regarding benefits of the Internet use for older adults up to date and highlight attributes that help older adults to build their online social network, maintain psychological well-being, and sustain their leisure engagement.

### **The Internet, Older Adults, and Leisure Participation**

Computer-based digitized technology, particularly via the Internet, provides plenty of opportunities for older individuals to partake in leisure through playing various online games. A tremendous amount of online leisure activities are available through multiple websites. Google Play offers many categories of entertainment: movies, TV, games, music, etc. Poki.com lists all types of online games for kids and adults: solitary games, social games, cognitive development games..., there are thousands of choices for one to choose from. ESPN.com has all kinds of fantasy sport games available on their website, including basketball, baseball, football, etc.

Online entertainment and games are especially meaningful to older folks. Living to an advanced age, many older adults gradually and increasingly experience decreased mobility due to physical illness, diseases, or retirement-induced disconnection to the pre-existing social network. Older adults' leisure involvement is threatened by these inevitable changes that rear their ugly head during the course of late-life. The Internet, however, may provide new channels for older people to maintain their leisure engagement. Grodsky & Gilbert (1998) reported that older people who were learning to use computers were primarily using them for word processing, record keeping, paying bills and having fun. Adler (1996) indicated that more than sixty percent of older adults who owned computers loved to play online games. Lee, Godbey, and Sawyer (2003) indicated that computers and the Internet may facilitate a high level of leisure satisfaction for older adults. This is particularly true of those growing into advanced age and developing age-related limitations to their mobility. An older adult with disabilities may take advantage of leisure opportunities available on the Internet to share their leisure interests and have fun with other users.

Heo, et al. (2011) surveyed 103 older adults between the ages of 60 and 87 to examine to what extent the Internet brings them leisure satisfaction. Heo et al. (2011) found that using the internet brings them multiple leisure related benefits, such as relaxation, the ability to strengthen or form new social relationships through social networking, psychological benefits such as increased self-confidence, entertainment, and being able to maintain or further develop intellectual skills. Charness

and Boot (2009) acknowledged that older adults are among the most active gamers, many report playing digitized games (i.e. video games) almost everyday. Recent research has revealed a growing interest with video games among older adults (Whitlock, A., McLaughlin, C., & Allaire, C., 2012). To supply the growing demand for video games coming from this grey market, some gaming companies have started customizing their products to cater to interests of older gamers (Lehart, A., Sydney. J., & Macgill, R., 2008). Some studies have already reported that older gamers have different preferences from younger players. They often prefer solitary games rather than games facilitated through multiple players and requiring more collaboration (Derboven, 2012). They also choose games that are designed to set the player against their environment rather than the player against other players, which focuses heavily on competition (Velooso, 2015).

As can be inferred from the findings of current researchers in this line of study, older adults are an emerging market for the digitized gaming industry. As research begins to explore how to make the design and interface of online games more senior friendly, we may anticipate more older adults will be able to compensate for mobility induced limitations to leisure by enjoying free, easy access to leisure opportunities via video or online games.

### **Developing Companionship**

Playing games, including video or online games, may facilitate new companionship opportunities for an older adult. A number of older adults share the same leisure interests and freely interact with others by playing games or engaging in online activities. As a result, leisure-generated companionship is likely to develop. Companionship has been found to contribute to one's psychological well-being (Kevin, 2000). Leisure companionship has been recognized as one of the fundamental human needs that drive people to participate in shared activities through the life-cycle, from play during childhood to leisure involvement in late-life (Iso-Ahola, 1980). Digitized technologies via the Internet can facilitate leisure involvement in the lives of members of the older population.

Of more importance to note, involvement in digitized technologies not only creates opportunities for finding companionship, but this companionship can lead to the development of real friendships. Mellor, Firth, and Moore (2008), found that after three months of computer training for those ranging in age from 55 to 88, including social networking, participants indicated that their increased computer and internet knowledge caused them to become more interesting to their peers, leading to an increase in invitations to social events in the real world.

Leisure-generated companionship can also be viewed as a form of social support. The construct of companionship contains a health-sustaining value in that it often creates interpersonal reward from engaging in a shared leisure activity undertaken primarily for the intrinsic goal of enjoyment (Rook, 1987). The development of companion relationships are important in later life (Cartensen, 1991). Older adults often develop companionship based relationships outside the realm of immediate family and ask for support from family members only if they encounter difficulties in their companion relationships (Rawlins 1995). Emotional support offered by family may exhibit negative outcomes as a result of family members feeling a sense of role obligation and expectations associated with this role of being a family member. Yet companionship based relationships are usually more egalitarian in nature (Nussbaum, 1994). Thus, for many older adults, companionship relationships are often perceived as more positive than supportive relationships with family.

Positive companionship relationships can be witnessed between people of different generations. In many cases, video games may bring family members together and strengthen intergenerational relationships. For example, older adults often play games with their grandchildren. In fact, youngsters love to assist older adults during games and share their skills and experiences with the elderly (Derboven, Gils, & Grooff, 2012). In Derboven, Gils, and Grooff's study, a video game encouraging intergenerational video communication and social interaction was specifically designed for this type of interaction, the TransCare shopping game. In this game, players have to memorize items on a common shopping list. In the first stage,

players see a shopping list with a number of groceries, (identical for all players) which they have to memorize. Players then buy the items that they remember seeing and put them in their shopping carts. Participants are allowed to see both their own and others' shopping carts. They can discuss the progress of the game using video chat and screen mounted web-cams. Players then move on to pay for the items they have bought. Finally, players get feedback on their performance by comparing the shopping list to items they actually bought. Players compare each other's carts to see who put the most correct items in their shopping cart. This game not only offers a fun way for older adults to interact with their family and friends, but allows them to work collaboratively with each other from a social aspect.

Keeping up with one's social network is a central concern for an older adult because it is critical to sustaining a healthy lifestyle and psychological well-being. It has been well documented in the research community that social support contributes to one's psychological well-being (Rook, 1987). Social support is a form of interpersonal transaction. It connects individuals and assists them in coping with their everyday lives (Barrera & Ainely, 1983; Gottlieb, 1983). Using digitized technologies to sustain social relationships is very meaningful for those older adults who are experiencing a shrinking social network and are at risk of becoming socially isolated. A number of studies have found that computer-based technology can allow for the development and enhancement of interpersonal relationships (McGurie, Keistler and Seigel, 1987; Rice & Love, 1987; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Walther, 1996). Wright (2000) indicated that older adults using SeniorNet received both informational and emotional support, which are usually associated with intimate social relationships.

### **Technology to Enhance Older Adults' Social Well-being**

Many older adults use computers and the Internet to maintain emotional and social contact with friends, relatives, and family members. Some of them frequently visit chat rooms to meet new people or explore their leisure interests/hobbies by gathering information on selected leisure activities via the Internet. A number of studies have indicated that using the Internet can bring multiple social benefits for older computer

users (Hogeboom, McDermott, Perrin, Osman, 2010; Zheng, Spears, Luptak, & Wilby, 2015). Some even identified social support as the main benefit of online communication with others (Bradley & Poppen, 2003; Clark 2002).

Among middle aged adults 50 and over and older adults over 65, Hogeboom et al. (2010) found in their cross-sectional study comparing differences in frequency of contact with friends and family between internet users and non-internet users that the internet users had a higher frequency of contact with family, friends, and confidants that was statistically significant.

Zheng, Spears, Luptak, & Wilby (2015) surveyed three-hundred and ninety-five adults between the ages of 55 and 70 on four reasons for using the internet: self-efficacy, social connection, psychological well-being, and health and financial needs. Social connection was found to be the reason participants rated as most important for using the Internet. Additionally, a correlation was found between social connection and self-efficacy, suggesting that as social connection increases, so does individual self-efficacy (Zheng et al., 2015).

Woodward, Freddolino, Blaschke-Thompson, Wishart, Bakk, Kobayashi, and Tupper (2011) conducted a six month computer training program with 83 adults 60 and over. They found

that the computer training resulted in a significant increase in the use of components of the Internet, such as email, Skype, and instant messaging, which in turn, helped participants keep in contact with members of their social network. Engagement in social activities became more frequent as a result of an increase in social capital over time, which led to increased social support and new forms of connectivity with friends and family.

More recently, Ancu (2012) carried out a study with Facebook users 50 and over to determine what makes using Facebook most rewarding for them. Ancu (2012) found that mood management through using Facebook helped prevent loneliness and receiving emotional support was the top reason users provided for continuing to use Facebook. Ninety-two percent of all respondents indicated that they are both friends with family members and their own friends on Facebook. Thirty-six-percent have even become connected with former or current colleagues.



Nimrod (2014) correctly hypothesized that participation in online senior communities brings psychological benefits associated with well-being and successful aging such as heightened mood and social companionship. Nimrod (2014) also found that the benefits reaped from online communication carried over in to the off-line lives of the participants in his study. Some participants met their online friends in person, exchanged ideas online about leisure activities such as sports and cooking, and acquired knowledge about health and financial issues impacting others their age (Nimrod, 2014). This study shows that just like younger people, older adults can also make new friends, acquire knowledge, date, learn about new leisure activities, and overall enrich their social lives through using the Internet.

Research on the psychological well-being of older adults has merit for promoting and enhancing the quality of life of seniors. According to the 2008 report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the majority of older Americans are able to successfully cope with the physical and cognitive changes associated with aging as well as various losses, such as the loss of family and friends. However, a substantial proportion of the population 55 years of age and older (about 20 percent of this age group) experience mental disorders associated with psychological well-being, including depression, anxiety disorders, and other aging-related mental health problems. These disorders are debilitating and severely affect the quality of life of affected older adults.

Moreover, research has found that the onset of mental disorders among older people suffering from depression, complaining of loneliness, and who are socially isolated is increasing (Schaie & Willis, 2002). Therefore, we may legitimately hypothesize there is a correlation between social isolation and poor psychological well-being. In particular, when people grow old, they may face the challenge of social disconnection, which could jeopardize their mental health. For example, retirement may push older adults away from a daily work environment and relocation to a residential facility may introduce a sense of alienation. Disease and illness may create physical limitations that impact mobility, which can lead to a loss of contact with family and close friends, resulting in further

shrinking of one's social network. All of these factors combined may lead to the initiation of a mental illness.

It is crucial to keep older adults socially connected in order to maintain or enhance their psychological well-being. Thanks to the advancement of computer-based information communication technologies via the Internet, a new window for older adults to reach outside of their confined household world has opened. As Baltes and Baltes noted (1990), knowledge-based use of technology can partially offset age-related decline. Research reports have revealed that seniors are embracing this new technology. Jones and Fox (2009) reported that the largest increase in Internet use since 2005 has taken place among the 70-75 year-old age group. About one-fourth of 70-75 year olds were online in 2005 and by 2009, 45-percent of this age group began using the Internet. Jones and Fox (2009) also noted that instant messaging, social networking, and blogging have gained ground as communication tools but email remains the most popular online activity among older Internet users.

Numerous investigations that took place within the research community have revealed the positive impacts of computer-based technologies on older adults' psychological well-being. Wright (2000) noted that computer-mediated social support helps older adults to form an online support network, while greater involvement in online communities may help older adults cope with perceived life stress. In Wright's (2000) study, online network involvement appeared to be the only significant predictor of lower levels of perceived life stress among older adults. Chen and Persson (2002) specifically conducted research to investigate the impact of the Internet on seniors' psychological well-being, finding that older Internet users were more positive than non-users in their responses to questions concerning psychological factors and personal characteristics. Older Internet users have reported a large range of positive impacts that the Internet provides, including reduced loneliness, enhanced competence, positive learning experiences, and an overall enhancement of well-being.

## **Conclusion**

The positive psycho-social impacts of online social communication and gaming have been well-documented. Over

half, sixty-percent, of the older adult population now utilize the Internet for social, gaming, and informational purposes (Smith, 2014). Gaming allows older adults to maintain social, and even intellectual, ties with grandchildren, (Derboven, et al., 2012; Charness & Boot, 2009; Whitlock et al., 2012; Lehart et al., 2008) helping older adults to keep up with the interests of their cyber generation grandchildren while staying intellectually challenged themselves. Gaming and social networking also help older adults develop companionship-based relationships or deepen current relationships to a companion level. Research has documented that companionship is a fundamental human need that stays with us from play time during childhood through leisure involvement in late-life (Iso-Ahola, 1980). Finding online companions may even alleviate family members of the sense of obligation they may feel to contribute social support to relatives (Nussbaum, 1994). The social support older adults gain from online relations with both friends and family alike allows them to cope with the struggles of everyday life (Barrera & Ainley, 1983; Gottlieb, 1983; Tracy & Whittaker, 1990) and counteracts the shrinking of social networks that can result from communication barriers such as retirement, mobility issues, and death that are common to late-life. Social networking sites have been found to combat loneliness common to late-life. Preventing loneliness and receiving emotional support have been given as primary reasons for using Facebook by older users and some users have even been reconnected with former colleagues, helping to bridge the loss in social connection brought about by retirement (Ancu, 2012).

Research is already beginning to reveal that social support and companionship brought about through online communication may even help counteract the development of mental disorders related to losses associated with aging, such as death and social network shrinkage. Chen & Persson (2002) found that the Internet users were more positive than non-internet users in their responses to questions regarding psychological factors and personal characteristics, providing hope that there may very well be a relationship between internet usage for social purposes and psychological well-being.

Clearly, as growing number of older adults are embracing new technologies. Future research on creations or interface of

social-based and technology-facilitated activities (networking, gaming, and other forms of online leisure) for older adults or intergenerational playmates are promised and warranted.

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