**This Girl Can**

Sport England’s Ground Breaking Campaign—Phase One (November 2014 to November 2015)

Sport England

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**Introduction**

Sport England is the government agency responsible for grassroots sport. Our primary purpose is to get more people playing sport and being active.

We achieve this by investing National Lottery and Government funding in a wide range of projects, programmes and organisations that get more people taking part in many different types of sport and exercise.

Our investment strategy is based on evidence and insight and we deliberately place an emphasis on behaviour change and social marketing principles and techniques to encourage more people to play sport, and support our investment partners to adopt these methods too.

This Girl Can is Sport England’s behaviour change campaign to get more women active. It was launched in January 2015 and is funded by the National Lottery.

In England, 1.75 million fewer women than men were exercising regularly. Despite the best efforts of sports brands, medical experts, the London 2012 Olympics & investment in facilities, this gap had...
remained stubbornly large.

As the government agency for grassroots sport, we wanted to reduce this gender gap by: “getting more women from the ages of 14–40 regularly active and into sport, and to keep them playing.” Specifically, our objectives were:

- To increase participation in sport and exercise among women and girls aged 14 to 40
- To change how women and girls aged 14 to 40 feel and think about exercising and playing sport
- To change the opportunities available to women to be active

We used an innovative approach to achieve maximum impact. The campaign was shaped by our extensive insight and reflected what women told us at all stages, from campaign planning, to creative development and delivery.

We identified a fear of judgement as the most significant barrier to being more active and designed the campaign to liberate women from this fear. We are seeing strong evidence that This Girl Can has already inspired more women to take part in sport and physical activity.

To date, 2.8 million women and girls in England have been inspired to get active by Sport England’s This Girl Can campaign. (Kantar Public Tracker, November 2015)

The reach of the campaign and the reaction to it – both in our target audience in England and across the world – has been extraordinary, and has surpassed all the industry norms.

**The insight that unlocked the behaviour change**

We know that women know the benefits of exercise. They feel guilty already. In fact, 75% of women said they wanted to do more exercise. But something was stopping them. Finding that barrier would be the key to unlocking a change in behaviour.

As might be expected with an audience spanning 26 years and varying life–stages, the barriers to exercise were many & incredibly diverse.

No single barrier was exclusive to an age group, socio-demographic group or life–stage. At any point, a woman might have one barrier or multiple, all constantly shifting with the world around her.

There was a clear set of barriers the marketing alone couldn’t solve: logistics. The absence of time, money or childcare are key barriers, but could not be addressed by advertising.

Removing the ‘logistics’ barriers from a long list of barriers identified a pattern that had not previously been spotted.

Every remaining barrier could be traced back to something truly unique, universal, fresh and emotionally powerful:

The fear of judgement.

It was fear that was stopping women from exercising. Women were worried about being judged on their appearance, during and after exercise; on their ability, whether they were a beginner or ‘too good’; or for spending time exercising instead of prioritising their children or studying.

### Judgement barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being sweaty</td>
<td>Not being fit enough</td>
<td>Spending time exercising when time with the family should be more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a red face</td>
<td>Not being good enough</td>
<td>Spending time exercising when time with friends should be more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not looking like I usually do (made up)</td>
<td>Not being competitive/serious enough</td>
<td>Spending time exercising when time studying/working should be more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing in front of others</td>
<td>Not knowing the rules</td>
<td>Spending time exercising when there are other things I should be doing that are more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing tight clothing</td>
<td>Not knowing what equipment to bring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing sports clothing</td>
<td>Bringing the wrong equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing the wrong clothing/kit</td>
<td>Holding back the group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing my body</td>
<td>Being too good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How my body looks during exercise (jiggling)</td>
<td>Being seen as too competitive/serious</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not appearing feminine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing too many muscles</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The execution of the campaign stayed true to the insight

This Girl Can was designed to liberate women from the judgements that hold them back. The campaign has developed to support and help women manage their barriers to being active, recognising the many steps to long-term behaviour change.

We recognised that both active and non-active women were fearful of being judged and didn’t realise that others felt the same way. Through encouraging conversation and addressing these judgements, This Girl Can created a moment of realisation that they are not alone, and in turn a positive sense of solidarity.

"The only thing I remember seeing is that ‘This Girl Can’ advert where they are basically trying to say that no matter your size, age etc. we can all do it if we try and that we’re all in the same position when trying to get fit. I love this advert because it reminds me of me – ha, I’m always self-conscious when I’m in a gym or feeling like I’m not fit enough!”

Future Thinking Cohort Study, 2016

Our insight also told us that an overwhelming number of women felt distanced from exercise, due to the portrayal of women and exercise in society. The usual combination of looking perfect and excelling at activity often makes it feel like an exclusive club they’re not invited to, and so This Girl Can set out to change this.

By celebrating a realistic vision of women and...
exercise in England, we created a campaign to provide women with inspiration and support to manage the barriers stopping them from being active.

We developed a This Girl Can manifesto based on a real understanding of our audience: ‘Women come in all shapes and sizes and all levels of ability. It doesn’t matter if you’re rubbish or an expert. The point is you’re a woman and you’re doing something.’

To reach our target audience, our insight told us to go where women are. This means not just creating a different perspective on sport and exercise but taking the conversation beyond the traditional channels and speaking to women in new places that included:

・Premiering our This Girl Can advert during a Monday night prime time TV show advert break (January 2015).
・Using a full-time social media presence on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram to curate conversation and engage with women online.
・Targeting consumer media like Mail Online, Grazia and Stylist.
・Utilising billboard, cinema and further TV advertising (January – March 2015, and May – June 2015) to reach women during the course of their everyday lives.

Recognising the role that self-identification plays in affecting behaviour change and our growing This Girl Can community who very much felt part of a movement, we also created a This Girl Can app. The app allows women to create their own This Girl Can poster, using the campaign’s mantras (such as ‘I kick balls. Deal with it’ and ‘Hot and not bothered’). In addition, the website (www.thisgirlcan.co.uk) provides helpful advice and signposting to women who want to become more active.

“I would definitely agree that This Girl Can is brave, radical and progressive. The campaign is a first of its kind by using real women to help other women summon up the courage to get active.” Poorna Bell, Executive Editor and Global Lifestyle Head, The Huffington Post.

“It’s not selling you anything. It doesn’t want you to buy some miracle product, try a new workout or even get into better shape. It just wants you to realise that you’re worthy of looking after your body too.” Taylor Anderson, Editor of Cosmo Body.

This Girl Can is more than an advertising campaign

The key to achieving success in converting this great response into more women playing sport is our work with our partners – sports, local government, schools, colleges, universities, brands, and charities.

At the launch of the campaign, Sport England created a suite of free tools and resources for registered partners to use to activate the campaign and get more women active. As well as marketing materials and imagery, the toolkit also includes access to the insight at the heart of the campaign.

Every organisation who registered for free as a ‘Supporter’ of This Girl Can is able to access these and 8,000 organisations have signed up as registered ‘Supporters’, from National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sports including England Netball and England Golf, to charities including Breast Cancer Now to delivery organisations such as County Sports Partnerships (CSPs), local authorities and leisure operators.

We also published a practical guide on engaging women and girls in sport for partners – to ensure our lessons are shared as widely as possible.

There are two key factors to why the campaign was so well received by women:

・The insight-driven creative: The qualitative research allowed for the fear of judgement to be fully understood, and this heavily informed the creative work. This enabled the resulting campaign to strike a chord with our target audience and become close to their hearts, as well as making the campaign more robust from any external criticisms.
・The unconventional approach: Allowing the creative to break both Government and

"It’s such a refreshing change"

Future Thinking Cohort Study, 2016
sporting advertising conventions meant that
the campaign was standout, fresh and news-
worthy. Increasing the diversity of women and
barriers featured in the campaign intensified
its relevance and likeability.

The campaign was highly engaging

• The campaign had over 95m views
• Online engagement was very high - 733,000
  mentions in social media
• We created a very large and active social
  community - 581,000 fans/followers across all
  platforms with over 1.2 m visits to the website
• Awareness of the campaign peaked at 51% amongst women aged 14 to 40 (Kantar Public
  Tracker, November 2015)
• Recognition of the campaign remained high
  throughout year one with good recall of key
  campaign messages, even in the absence of
  above the line activity.
  ▪ 6.8 million (72%) women aged 14-40
  recognised the This Girl Can advert
  (Kantar Public Tracker, November 2015)
• The campaign has been talked about over a
  thousand times every day on social media
  since the campaign was launched on 12
  January 2015
• The campaign was talked about in over 110
  countries
• The campaign is motivating women and
  personal resonance of This Girl Can has
  increased (Kantar Public Tracker, 2015)
• 70% women report being motivated when
  shown the advert (March 2015). This puts
  This Girl Can in the top group of adverts for
  motivation
• 4.8 million (71%) of brand recognisers agree
  ‘This Girl Can is aimed at people like me’ (up
  from 3.7 million (59%) in March 2015)

Partners used the campaign assets
(spreading the message further)

Schools, offices, clubs and societies all got behind
the campaign. They used the logo & imagery and
created their own content. Schools ran special
classes on ‘confidence’ using the ad to start the
conversation & they ran activity weeks, put up
large wall displays and encouraged girls to post
their out-of-school activity too.

Schools and clubs made videos that they posted
online showing what activity they did and welcom-
ing new members of every level.

Wembley Stadium (the National Soccer Stadium),
asked if they could run the ad for free on their
massive electronic screen. And the BBC even
recreated our ad using female TV presenters.

Over 8,000 partners have signed up to use our
Partner Toolkit. This encompasses all kinds of
organisations from core cities across the country
right down to individual Zumba teachers.

The highest profile partnership has been with
M&S, where we created two t-shirt ranges and an
entire leisurewear range. All sold out!
The campaign had an extremely positive impact on women’s attitudes towards activity

We ran an online panel study, alongside our quantitative tracking study, with the objective of understanding in depth the impact on a cohort of women in England and any related change in behaviour and activity. The respondents were not aware that the panel was being run by This Girl Can so we were able to see the campaign’s natural

Confidence and Belonging have increased by +30% and +17% respectively

Source: Kantar Public Tracker (July 2015 (698) vs. May 2016 (700) / November 2014 (694) vs. May 2016 (700))
effect on them. The research concluded: ‘Almost all who have viewed the campaign talk of a shift in feeling – an increase in motivation to participate in sport and exercise’.

Future Thinking Cohort Study, 2016

The most recent wave of qualitative tracking data shows the communication worked by increasing the percentage of women who felt confident enough to stop caring about what others thought of them. And it helped women feel that they belonged when they were active.

NB The confidence question was only added in July 2015 (six months after launch).

But most importantly, This Girl Can is changing behaviour

We have been inundated with women attributing their return to exercise directly to the campaign. It has encouraged them to do something that they may have not done otherwise, and they are recognising the effect and thanking This Girl Can for it:
• Our tracking study asked women what influence the campaign had had on their activity levels. If we extrapolate it up to national population levels it tells us that:
  ◦ 2.8 million women have been more active as a result of seeing the campaign.
  ◦ Of those, 1.6 million have started or re-started exercise as a result of seeing the campaign. (Kantar Public Tracker, November 2015)
• The number of women playing sport and getting active once a week, every week, has also increased by 250,000 since we launched the campaign. This is much harder to shift! (Sport England Active People survey results, October 2016)

And we now know even more about how women navigate in and out of activity

Barriers don’t go away; it’s about managing them – it’s about gathering the confidence to go ahead in spite of them. The impact of barriers on behaviour is reduced with activity, but it’s an on-going battle.

This Girl Can plays a strong role at each stage of the activity journey.

Life stage changes nudge women in and out of activity. There are some key trigger points and out of routine opportunities that the campaign could play to.

Even when a routine is established, small things (as well as big events) can de-rail progress and create a set-back. Anything from a change in schedule or ‘falling off the diet wagon’, to family issues or illness can impact motivation to exercise, and judgement barriers start to take-over.

But they can also be moments of positive change. Crucially, we understand that developing confidence leads to action and then helps build resilience – but it’s a constant battle! Recognising

![Once a week sport participation (1 x 30) by gender, millions](chart.png)

Source: Sport England’s Active People results for the 12 months to the period shown on the chart. Dotted line showed between APS1 and APS2 where there was no data collection.
this cycle as something everyone goes through leads to a sense of belonging.

It’s ok to have breaks or ‘wobbles’. As much as most women have a fear of judgement in common, they’re also not alone in having set-backs and plucking up the confidence to go back.

The learning we have gained from the first year of the campaign has been huge and has fed directly back into the development of This Girl Can phase two.

But we know this alone cannot change the way sport is presented to women. The provision of sport and exercise needs to be right too. That’s why we have published a practical guide for deliverers of sport that are keen to engage more women and offer them more appealing ways of becoming active.