



This Girl Can: inspiring millions to exercise

Marketing Society Awards 2016
Brand: Sport England
Category: Not-for-profit-marketing





Executive Summary

Despite the best efforts of the biggest sports brands and the health and fitness industry, 1.75 million fewer women than men were exercising regularly¹ in 2014 – a worryingly large and stubborn gender gap in England’s exercise participation levels.

Whilst exercise levels were increasing, considerably less women than men were taking part, and so Sport England briefed FCB Inferno with an exciting challenge:

“The aim of the campaign is simple: to get more women from the age of 14-40 regularly active and into sport and to keep them playing.”²

The aim was simple, but the target audience was broad. The solution needed to elicit mass behaviour change, and needed mass influence.

In just one year, This Girl Can has inspired 2.8 million women to do more exercise: of whom 1.6 million have started exercising, and 1.2 million have increased their activity levels. But its impact doesn’t stop there.

This paper is about a campaign that has reshaped the way we think about women and exercise, and shows the importance of a powerful insight and marketing bravery in changing behaviour.

¹Active People Survey results released January 2014
²Sport England pitch brief, 2014

Where are all the women?

In 2014, 1.75 million fewer women were playing sport than men³. Overall participation levels had grown over the past decade, but the gender gap had not closed. The biggest sports brands had spent millions targeting women, yet the disparity remained. Health experts had proved that inactivity was twice as likely as obesity to cause an early death, but to no avail.

Sport England has been concerned about the gender gap in sport for some time and is committed to closing it. Having driven some improvement in the supply side, they knew that to tackle the issue, something dramatically different would be required – something that addressed the demand side and talked directly to women.

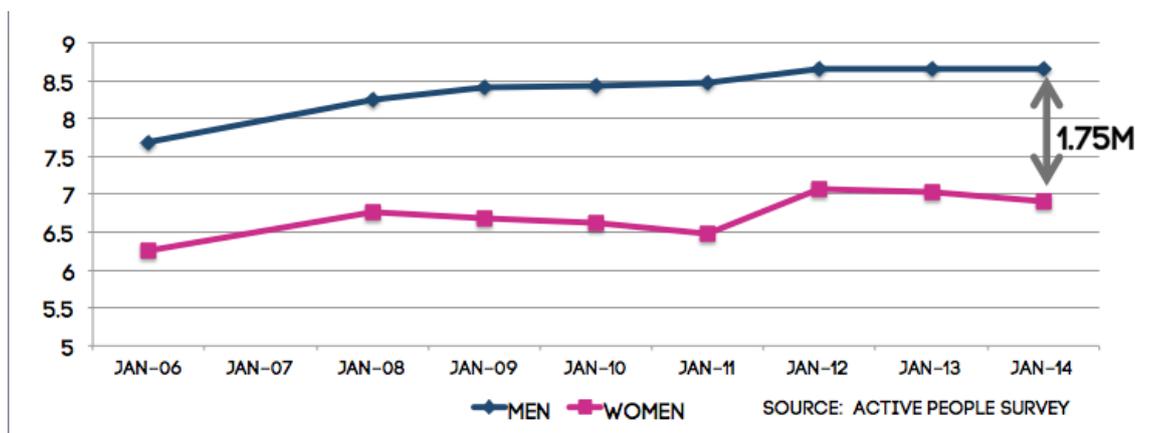
This led to Sport England's first ever 360° marketing campaign. Launching a high profile behaviour change campaign with communications at its heart meant that the stakes were high and expectations higher.

The brief to FCB Inferno had a number of objectives...

- Be relevant and inspiring enough that women aged 14-40 would want to become a part of, talk about and share it with friends and family
- Reshape the language around sport and exercise
- Be endlessly adaptable for all channels
- Create impact, quickly
- Allow for multiple partners to leverage it

... with the ultimate goal of getting more women in England aged 14-40 taking part in activity regularly.

A VERY STUBBORN GENDER GAP



³ Active People Survey results released January 2014



The starting point: enticing women to exercise

We began by looking for the benefits of exercise and found three potentially powerful claims:

Exercise releases you from everyday stresses
Exercise can be a fun, social way to bond with friends
Exercise produces endorphins, which make you feel 'great' post-activity

Unfortunately, they weren't universal. Even the endorphin effect which, in theory, is true of everyone who exercises, is not felt by all.

We'd hit a dead end, so went back to the research. Here, something stood out – the target audience already understood the benefits of exercise and 75% said they wanted to do more. But they weren't.

We were looking for the wrong thing. We didn't need to incentivise exercise; we needed to uncover what was stopping women from doing it.

A wall of barriers

We conducted qualitative research to understand our audience further. As might be expected with an audience spanning 26 years, the barriers to exercise were incredibly diverse. Firstly, they were endless.

Not being fit enough Showing their body Being seen in Lycra It's too far away
It's too expensive Not knowing the rules Having a red face Being sweaty
Wearing sports clothing Being the worst one there Not appearing feminine
Not being competitive enough I can't get there Bringing the wrong equipment
Family should be more important Not being good enough Holding back the group
Changing in front of others Wearing tight clothing Studying should take priority
Need childcare Time with friends should be more important Exercise isn't cool
Being the only new person Wearing the wrong clothing/kit Not looking 'made up'
Housework takes priority Developing too many muscles Being 'too' good
Body parts wobbling when exercising Being seen as too competitive Looking silly

Removing the logistical barriers

Looking at the barriers, there was a clear set that couldn't be solved: logistics. The absence of time, money or childcare are key barriers, but couldn't be addressed by advertising. Having removed these from our long list, an interesting pattern emerged.

A unifying barrier

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

THE FEAR OF JUDGEMENT

Fear was stopping women from exercising.

If you haven't experienced this fear it can be hard to comprehend, but it was a powerful force over our audience, and one they didn't fully recognise themselves.

Women 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. Every barrier we'd encountered fitted neatly into one of these three areas.

FCB Inferno

Judgement – Three Core Areas

Sport England

Appearance

Being judged for:

- Being sweaty
- Having a red face
- Not looking like I usually do (made up)
- Changing in front of others
- Wearing tight clothing
- Wearing sports clothing
- Wearing the wrong clothing/kit
- Showing their body
- How their body looks during exercise (jiggling)
- Not appearing feminine
- Developing too many muscles

Ability

Being judged for:

- Not being fit enough
- Not being good enough
- Not being competitive/serious enough
- Not knowing the rules
- Not knowing what equipment to bring
- Bringing the wrong equipment
- Holding back the group
- Being too good
- Being seen as too competitive/serious

Time

Being judged for:

- Spending time exercising when time with family should be more important
- Spending time exercising when time with friends should be more important
- Spending time exercising when time studying/working should be more important
- Spending time exercising when there are other things I should be doing that are more important

We also found encouraging evidence that an increase in women's confidence would lead to an increase in exercise.

"Gaining self confidence was a major influence towards increasing activity."⁴

We had found the universal insight we needed.

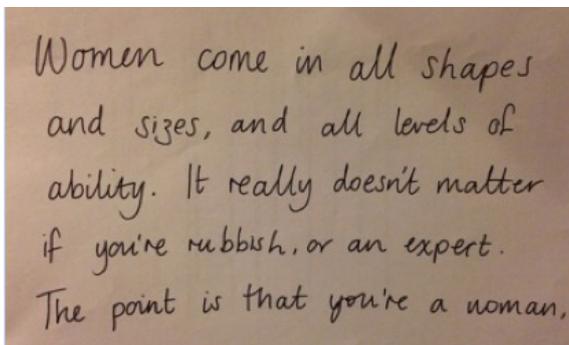
⁴ Source: Health Education Research, 'Girls and women's participation in physical activity'

A clear role for communications

The role for the campaign became clear:

To liberate women from the judgements that hold them back.

Rather than turning this into a creative brief, a short manifesto was written to express our intention.



Challenging the status quo

Sometimes, we are so used to something, it is hard to see that it might be part of the problem. This was the case with the genre of fitness advertising.

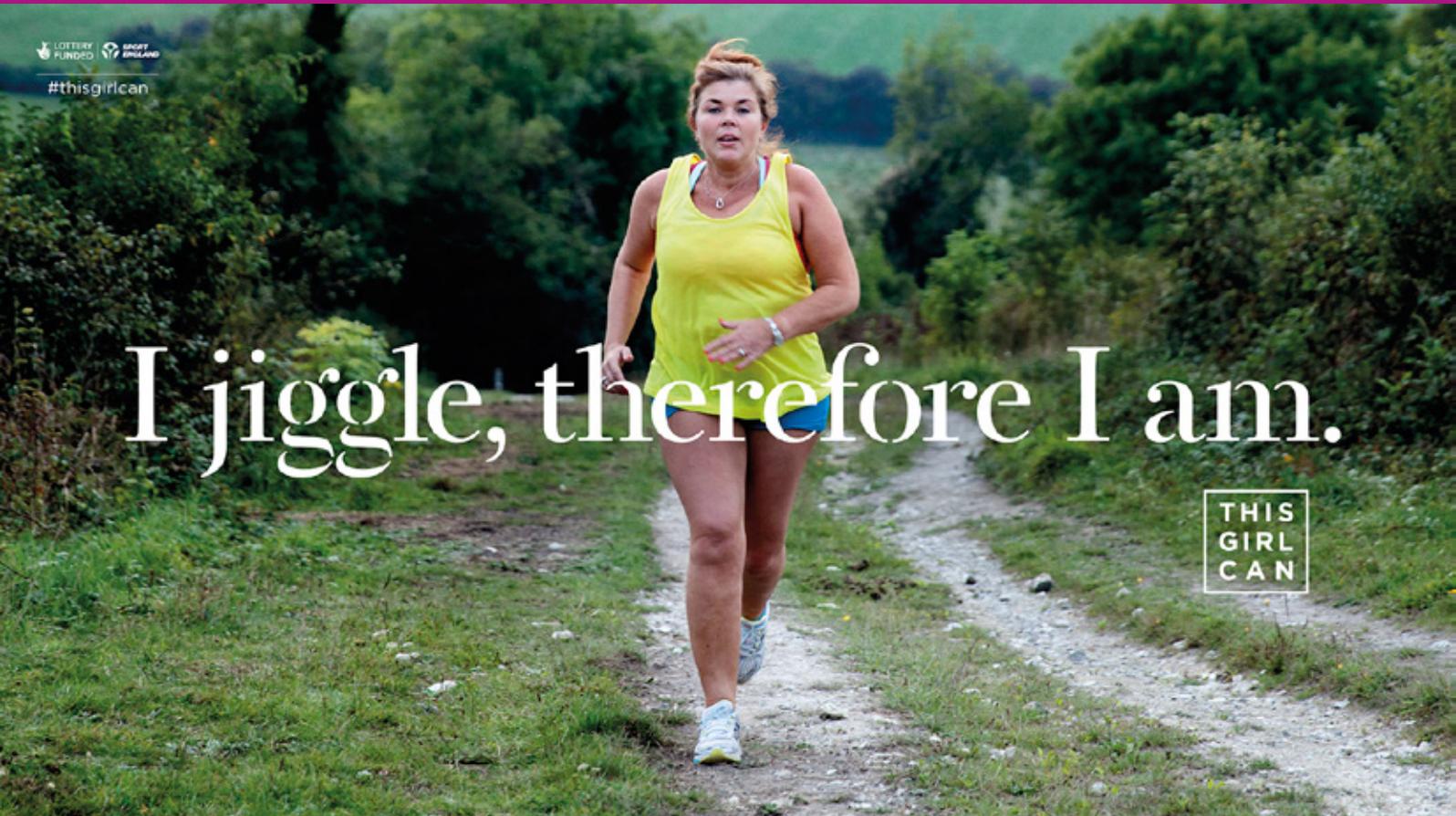
The accepted 'aspirational' imagery (glowing six-packs and slim waists) was intimidating and pushing women away. Uncompromising lines about winning fell on deaf ears - our audience found this demotivating.



We needed to redefine 'aspiration'. The key was not in appearance or achievement, but in showing women of all shapes, sizes and abilities with an aspirational confidence: a "don't give a damn" attitude.



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The power of the creative idea

The resulting creative was 'This Girl Can', a celebration of the triumph of attitude over society's judgement. We championed active women across England who were doing their thing no matter how they do it or how they look.

The campaign name itself armed women with positivity and empowerment. It had 'hashtagability' at its heart - women could use and own it themselves easily.

The premise was simple but phenomenally powerful, and empowered women in two ways.

Firstly, it provided positive role models. We street-cast women from across England with jiggle bits, sweat patches and importantly, that vital "don't give a damn" attitude. The kind of attitude we'd all like to have.

Secondly, it provided women with a strategy for dealing with the judgement they fear: the riposte. The art of taking an insult, acknowledging it and throwing it straight back with an added piece of wit. Cognitive behavioural therapy suggests that

to beat a fear, you have to face it, so we took the fear of judgement head on. Every campaign line or 'mantra' we armed our audience with was based on the woman it featured alongside and therefore came with the power of a human truth.



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LOTTERY FUNDED SPORT ENGLAND #thisgirlcan



A campaign with social at its core

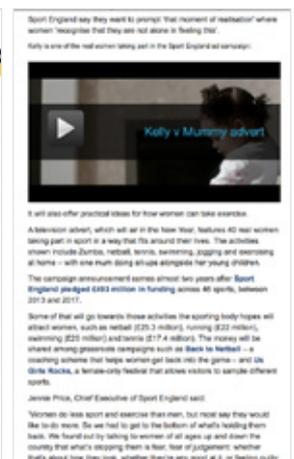
To ensure the campaign landed in the best way possible, Sport England and its PR agency, Blue Rubicon, engaged a range of influencers and partners during the creative development process, creating a base of supporters before launch. In parallel FCB Inferno developed a three-phased behaviour change approach:

1. Realisation

Whilst fear of judgement was the universal barrier to exercise, it wasn't necessarily talked about and women didn't realise others felt judged too. We set out to spark conversations online and in social media to help women realise that they were far from alone in feeling that way.

The campaign soft-launched in October 2014, announced by Sport England CEO Jennie Price at the Women In Sport conference. Blue Rubicon worked with select media titles to create a succession of articles discussing the fear of judgement to introduce our creative work:

a series of online films, each telling the story of one hero woman (Kelly, Julie, Victoria or Grace) overcoming their individual barrier to exercise.





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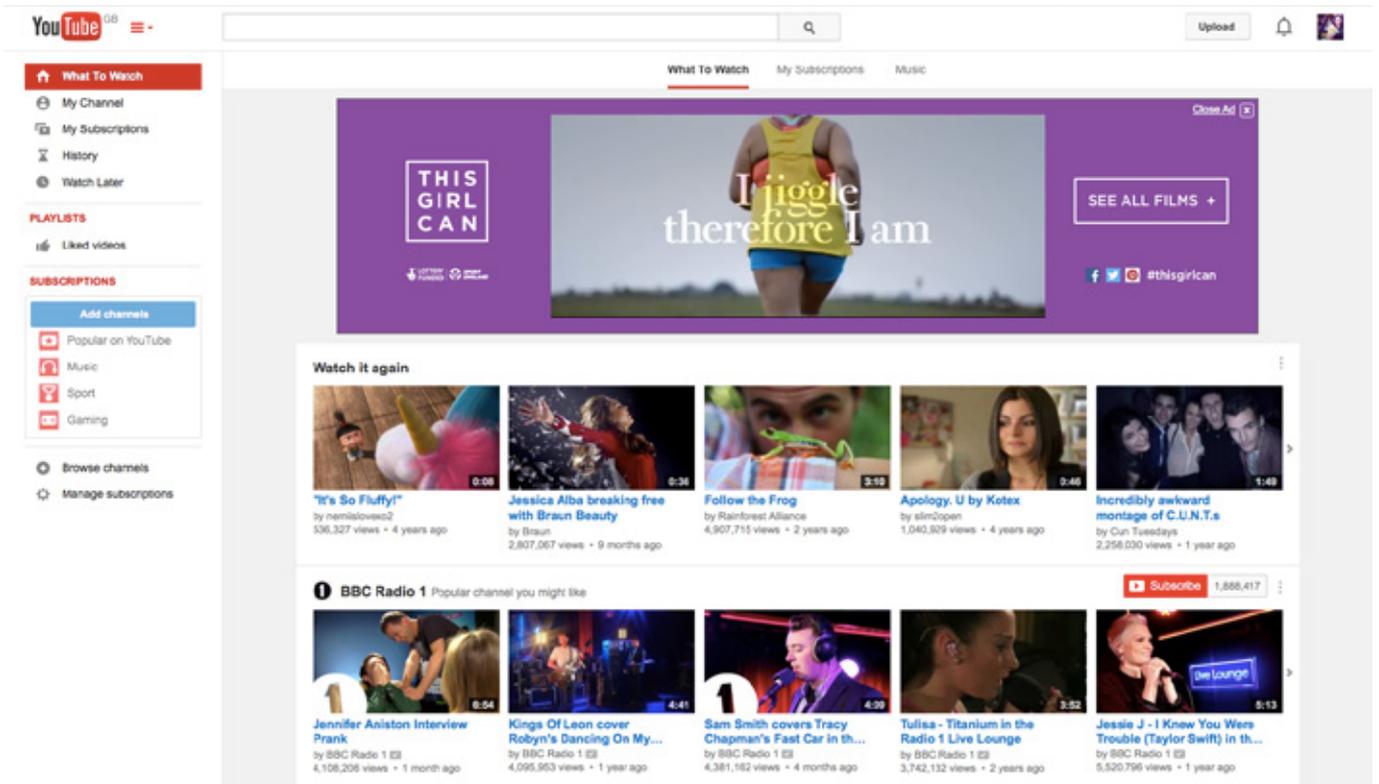
Using a unique social algorithm we identified women Tweeting their exercise anxieties and, in a truly social way, started proactive conversations to support and encourage confidence in the women who needed us most.



2. Inspiration

Our second stage focused on inspiring women on a mass level.

To encourage as many women as possible and create a new societal norm, we launched with broadcast creative on primetime TV. The 90"/60"/30" TV campaign was supported by a 90" cinema ad, YouTube takeover, digital and social ads and a national poster campaign.



3. Self-identification

Behavioural economics suggests that making a public statement improves the likelihood of cementing new attitudes and habits. Phase three focused on encouraging women to self-identify by using the campaign. If we had managed to empower women with the confidence to exercise, we wanted them to shout about it; whether that be talking about their activity, sharing their exercise photos or simply by using #ThisGirlCan.

This Girl Can
15 March · 🌐

Happy Mother's Day! We love this pic of Kiki and Jojo, a mother and daughter pair with a shared passion for netball. If you exercise with your family, we want to see the pics!

Unlike · Comment · Share

👍 You, Kirsty Chase and 320 others like this. Most Relevant ▾

🔄 11 shares

Write a comment...

Hannah West Running a 5k colour run with my 7 year old daughter 😊 x

Hannah West Running a 5k colour run with my 7 year old daughter 😊 x

Like · Reply · 👍 7 · 15 March at 13:41

This Girl Can Lovely, Hannah! Was this before or after the paint came out?!

Hayley Lever First road bike ride together today. Happy Mother!

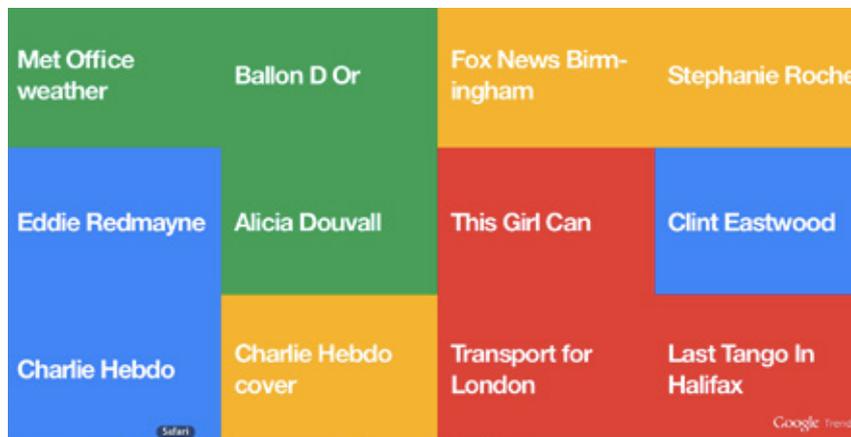
Like · Reply · 👍 6 · 15 March at 13:28

The results: Girls Who Can

Since This Girl Can launched, it has received an overwhelmingly positive response.

The campaign landed incredibly well amongst media, influencers and our target audience.

Within days of the broadcast launch the campaign trended twice on Twitter, made it into Google's Hot Trends and Top 12 Trending Searches. We received twelve consecutive days of positive news coverage with more than 110 pieces, and every TV breakfast show in England wanted an interview.



The core film has racked up over 57.1 million views and 806,400 shares. Starting from scratch in October 2014, we now have 327,000 fans on Facebook, 86,300 on Twitter and 81,000 on Pinterest. Campaign mentions have reached 690,000 and incredibly, women were sharing the outdoor executions and cinema ad, turning paid-for media into earned media.

Olympians, Paralympians, politicians from across the House, leading feminists and fellow brands have shown support for the campaign. However it is our audience who have fully embraced the campaign as their own.

Online, we have an army of supporters, or “Tinkerbells” (our term for the antithesis of online trolls), who add their own words of positivity to support women they’ve never met before and voluntarily defend the campaign on the rare occasion that it comes under criticism .



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Weeks after launching we were so inundated with requests for merchandise that we partnered with Marks & Spencer to create This Girl Can clothing range. We've since launched two t-shirt ranges and an activewear collection, the first of which sold out online in just one day.

Erica Seiffert - This Girl Can
29 January at 17:03 · Bloomington, IN, United States · 🌐
Any chance this campaign is going to come out with some t-shirts? I know that when I was having a bad motivational day at the Y the other day - I thought of this campaign to help push me through. When it was done I really wanted a t-shirt with the "this girl can" logo. 😊
Like · Comment · Share · 📌

Zoe Howard - This Girl Can
15 February at 17:31 · 🌐
Hi are there This Girl Can tshirts available to buy?
Like · Comment · Share · 🗨️ 1

Caroline Bowen-Fleming - This Girl Can
15 February at 21:47 · 🌐
How do I get a tshirt or vest please?? Neeeeeee one 😊 x
Like · Comment · Share · 🗨️ 2

Laura Wooles - This Girl Can
14 February at 21:06 · Credenhill · 🌐
How can I buy a "This Girl Can" t.shirt please?
Like · Comment · Share

nell read @nread
🌐 Follow
@ThisGirlCanUK how and where do I get merchandise please! I ran 10 miles this morning #ThisGirlCan

Michelle Bowen BEST. ADS. EVER!! These ads should be on a global scale! Inspires me to keep going. Where can we get the T-shirts.
Like · Reply · 11 hours ago

M&S EST 1884
FIND A STORE · HELP · SIGN IN · REGISTER · SPARKS · YOUR BAG (0) 🛒

VALENTINE'S INSPIRE ME · WOMEN | INGER | BEAUTY | MEN | KIDS · HOME & FURNITURE · FOOD & WINE · FLOWERS & GIFTS · OFFERS · M&S BANK

SALE - UP TO 50% OFF | FURNITURE - BUY 2 SAVE 20% | FREE SHIRT & TIE WITH A £129 SUIT

THIS GIRL CAN
We are proud to be an official partner of Sport England's This Girl Can Campaign and we are donating 8% of all sales to Sport England to help fund projects that help women be more active.
Shop the collection

Our top picks

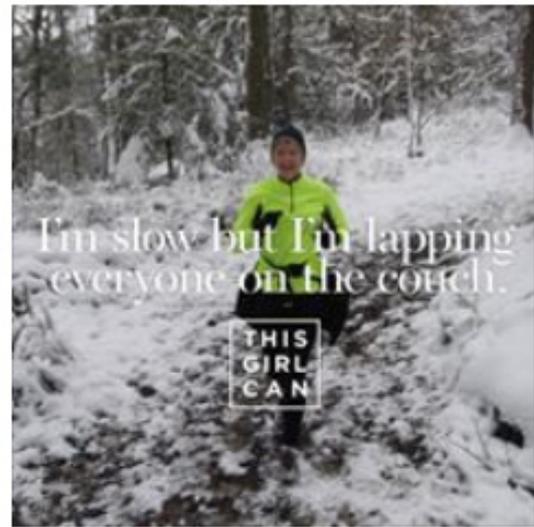
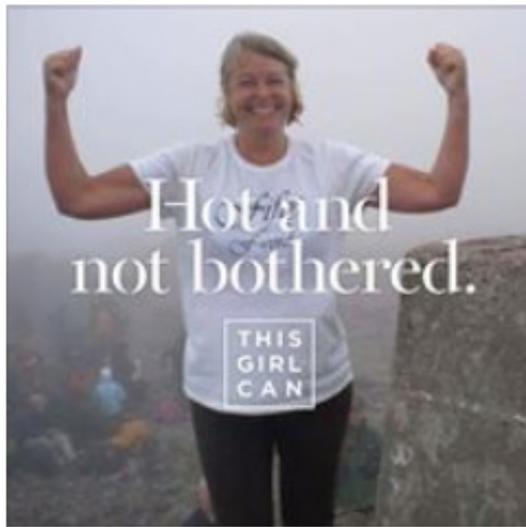
- Shop sweatshirt
- Shop vest top
- Shop leggings
- Shop t-shirt

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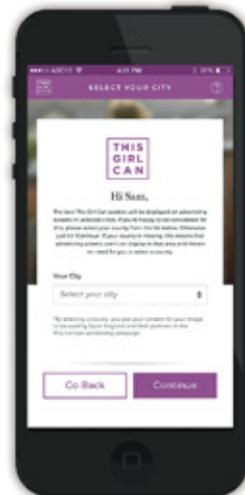
Recently viewed · Saved items (0) · YOUR BAG (0) 🛒



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We launched a 'mantra app' - so women could create their own This Girl Can poster - which has had over 16,000 uploads since launching last Summer. And a Facebook fan even revealed the first ever This Girl Can tattoo.





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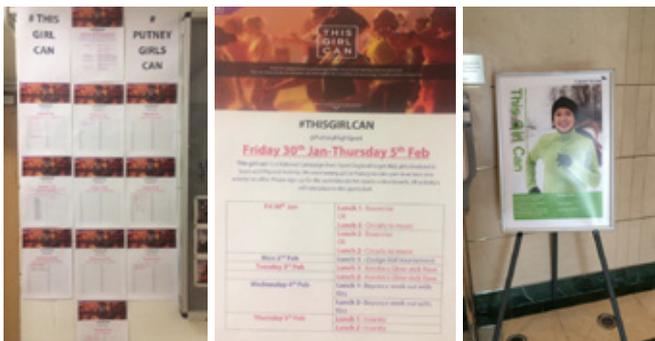


A vast array of partners have taken the campaign on as their own.

Over 7,700 partners have signed up for the This Girl Can toolkit. This includes the BBC, who invited us to speak as part of an expert panel about appealing to women just three months after the broadcast launch.

Local authorities, parents, schools, libraries, universities and companies as large as Credit Suisse are using This Girl Can to encourage women to become more active.

Wembley, the home of football, asked to host the ad for free. Sports clubs, universities and even the BBC created their own versions of the 90" film and we have recently become an official partner of Sport Relief 2016 .



Jamie Barry Really brilliant. My sporty daughter at primary school has suddenly gone off doing sport at High school. Slowly winning her back and this is the sort of thing I need to help. Thank you.
Like · Reply · 13 mins



The campaign has reached 111 countries with no international spend, and has resonated so highly that governing bodies in Australia, Scotland and other nations are asking how to replicate its success.



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FW: Public Affairs Update – 20 January 2015 – Inbox

Message

FW: Public Affairs Update – 20 January 2015
Sent: Tuesday, 20 January 2015 16:24

Subject: Public Affairs Update - 20 January 2015

Public Affairs Update – 20 January 2015

This Girl Can

Campaign Endorsed by Government and Opposition in Parliament

At Culture, Media and Sport oral questions on Thursday 15 January Helen Grant, Minister for Sport, expressed her strong support for This Girl Can and the Shadow Sports Minister, Clive Efford, joined her in welcoming the campaign. Both were wearing This Girl Can badges, as was the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Sajid Javid, which the Public Affairs team delivered to the frontbench team of both parties. Gloria De Piero, Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities was seen with her This Girl Can canvas bag on the opposition frontbench.

MPs and Peers come out in support of campaign

A number of MPs have already shown their support to This Girl Can demonstrating the cross-party support for the campaign which is building in Parliament. This has included:

- Maria Miller MP
- Barbara Keeley MP
- Julian Huppert MP
- Tracey Crouch MP
- Baroness Royall of Blaisdon
- Jo Swinson MP
- Tessa Jowell MP
- Valerie Vaz MP
- Clive Efford MP

This Girl Can to be focus of Women and Sport All-Party Parliamentary Group Session

On Wednesday 28 January, members of the Women and Sport APPG will be discussing how to inspire women and girls to get involved in sport and will focus on Sport England's This Girl Can campaign. Lisa O'Keefe will show the full version of the advert to MPs and Peers in attendance and talk to them about the research and insight behind the campaign.

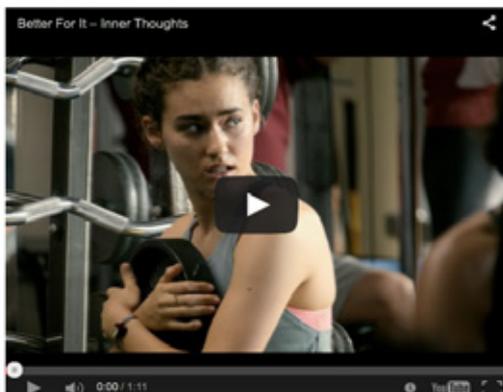
We are reshaping society's approach towards women and exercise.

The Government and media industry are changing the way they talk to, and about, women. Students have featured This Girl Can in dissertations about the future of the sport industry and it has been discussed in Parliament and featured in the Public Affairs Update email.

At the end of last year Nike launched "Better For It": a step away from their usual competitive advertising style, which has been widely attributed to the influence of This Girl Can.

Ad of the Day: Nike - Better for It - Inner Thoughts

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- Ad of the D Lurpak- Fre

From data display - 1 AdWords for 2015

Nike has called on women to get over their 'gym-timidation' with a new campaign showing the sweaty, judgemental and unglamorous side of exercise. Reminiscent of Sport England's 'This Girl Can' work from the UK earlier in the year, the 'Inner Thoughts' creative uses a humorous tone to encourage women to get over the insecurities that stop them working out.

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:

 **Kirsty Beckles** I love this campaign! #ThisGirlCan
It actually inspired me to get back into the gym. Lost 10 pounds already and feeling much better!

Also stealing someone else's hashtag #RubyRocks!
Like · Reply · 7 hours ago

 **Stephanie-Jade Coates** I've taken football up thanks to this campaign 😊
Unlike · Reply · 1 · 20 hours ago

 **Kiri Dowdall** ▶ This Girl Can
29 January at 13:18 · Hough Green · 🌐
First day in a few years of being back in yoga practice! And I joined a gym...Feels good! Inspiration from This Girl Can!
Like · Comment · Share · 1

 **Elizabeth Hull** ▶ This Girl Can
7 February at 09:35 · 🌐
Just want to say thank you to the woman who jogs in the video. Never ran in my life. Am 43 years old and she gave me the inspiration to give it a go. Ran for the first time this morning and feel great!!!!
Like · Comment · Share

13 February 2015
HUFFPOST LIFESTYLE
UNITED KINGDOM

 **Rachel Moss** @rachelmoss
#ThisGirlCan Convinced Me to Have a Swimming Lesson, Age 23 and a Half
Photo: iStockphoto.com/Chris Dwyer | Twitter: @chrisdwyer

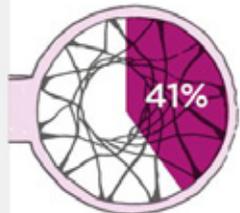
This anecdotal evidence has been heavily supported by our own research.

Independent qualitative research undertaken by Future Thinking concluded that: “almost all who have viewed the campaign talk of a shift in feeling – an increase in motivation to participate in sport and exercise”. A national quantitative study conducted by TNS BMRB has found that the campaign has inspired 2.8 million women to do more exercise: 1.6 million of whom have started exercising, and 1.2 million who have increased their participation.

The Telegraph
Lifestyle | Women
Lifestyle · Women · Life
This Girl Can: 2.8 million women inspired to exercise by ads that refused to body-shame them
f share t

Damn right I look hot.
By **Radhika Sanghani**
12 JANUARY 2016 · 7:00AM
Sport England's This Girl Can campaign has inspired millions of British women to get active.

2.8 million of you have made the leap.


41%
41% of women aged 14-40 who recognise the campaign say they have done some or more activity as a result – equivalent to **2.8m women** across England.

Source: TNS BMRB for Sport England



Whilst the initial aim was simple – to get more women aged 14-40 to exercise regularly – achieving this was exceptionally challenging. But by uncovering a powerful insight, challenging the status quo and being creatively brave, we got women up and down the country inspired and exercising on an unprecedented level.

Word count

Executive summary: 180

Paper: 2,000